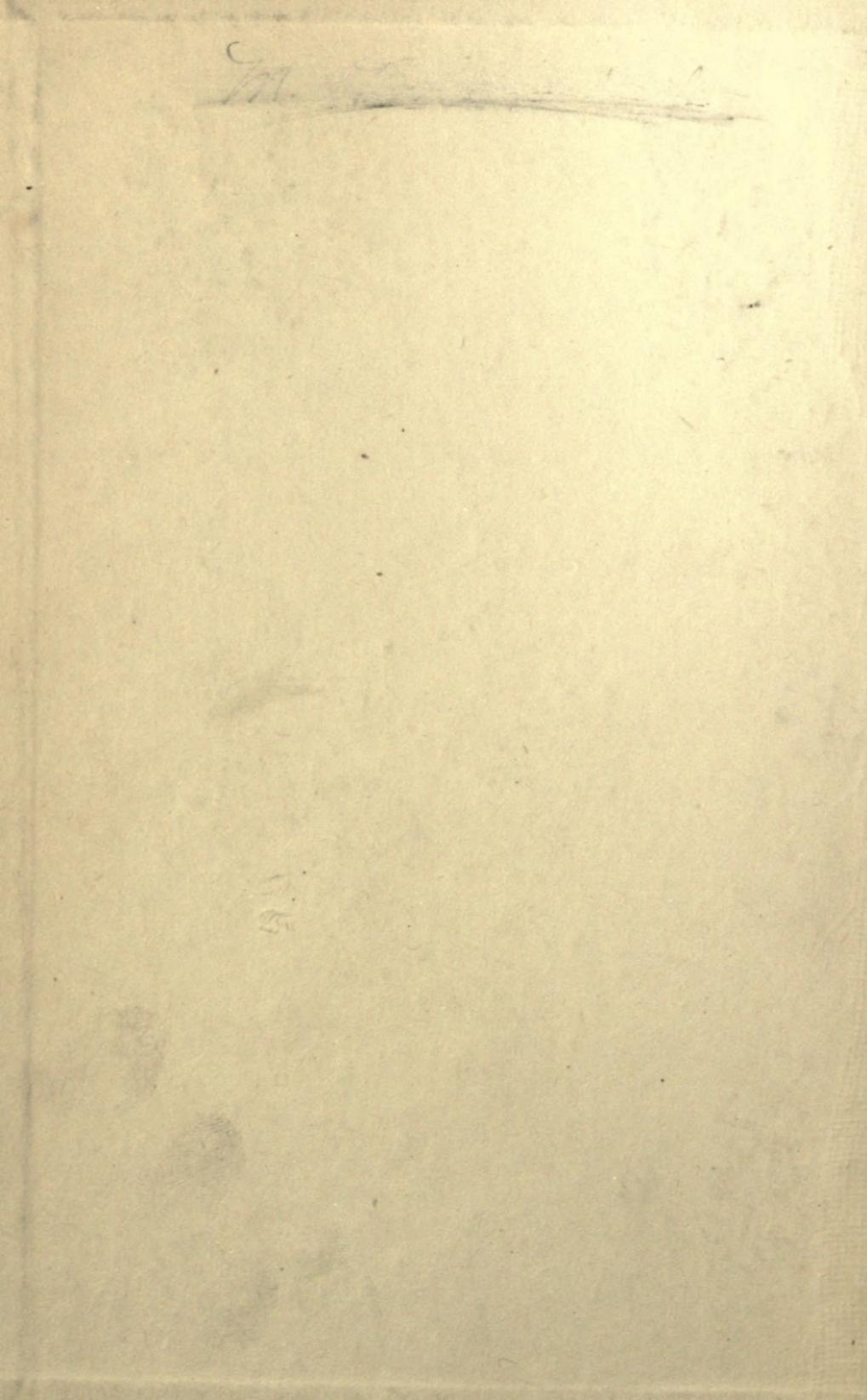


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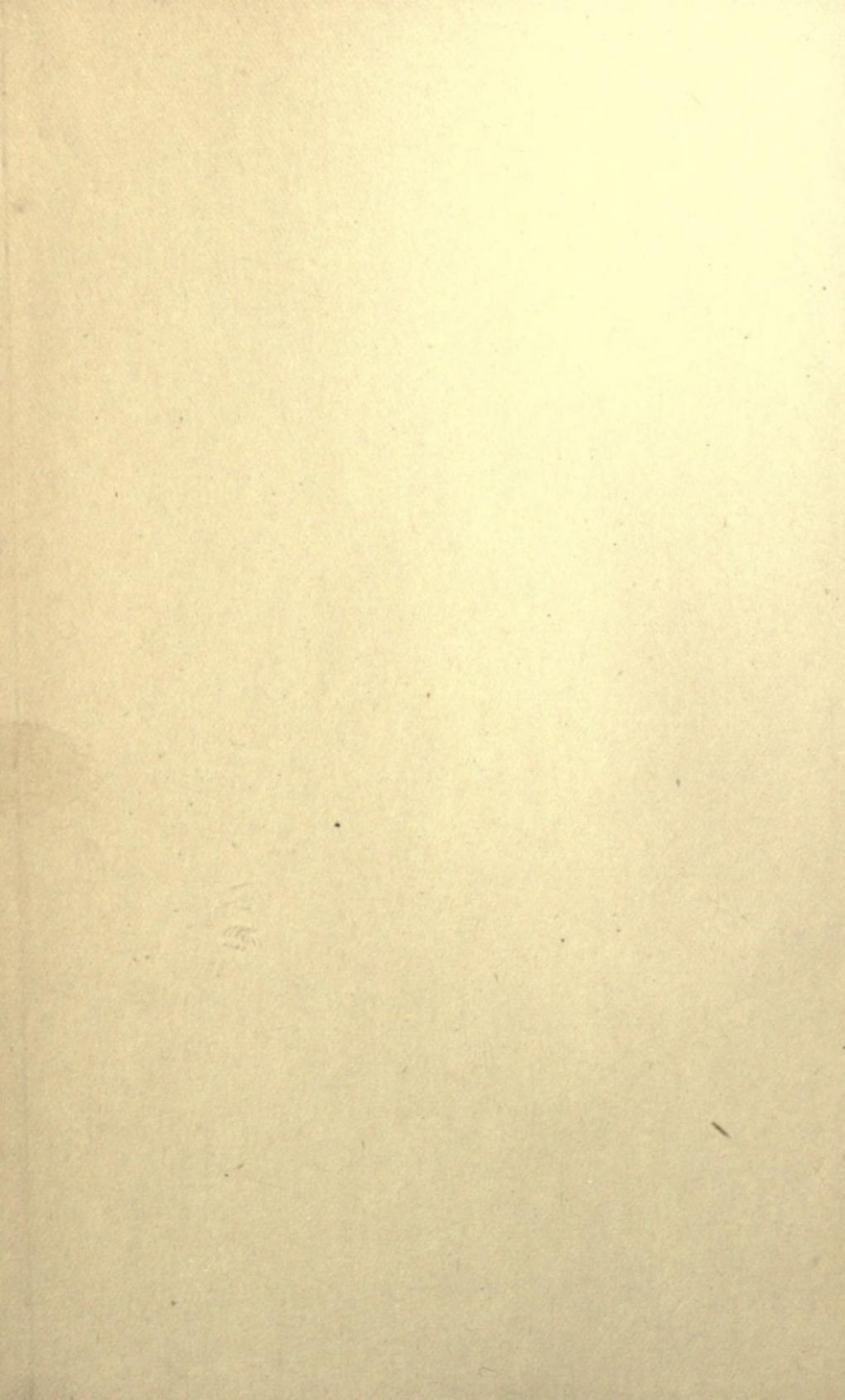
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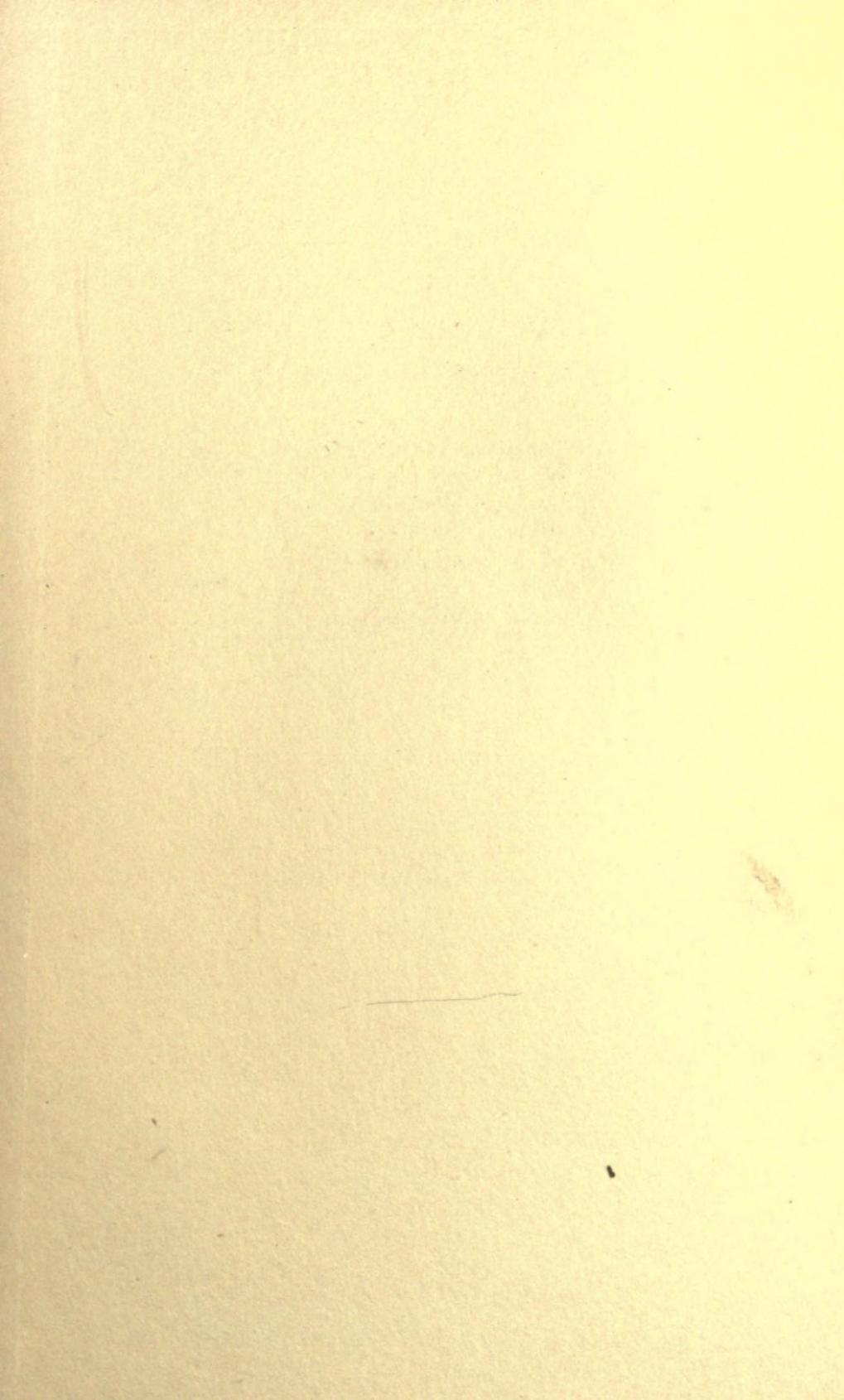


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"No," said Prime soberly, "it was—er—it looks as if it might have been an aeroplane."

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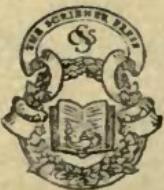
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To
L. A. H. L.

WHOSE ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN SIMILAR FIELDS
ARE MUCH MORE VERSATILE THAN
LUCETTA'S
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED BY
“P-D.”

2131140

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STRANDED IN ARCADY

I

THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

At the half-conscious moment of awaking Prime had a confused impression that he must have gone to bed leaving the electric lights turned on full-blast. Succeeding impressions were even more disconcerting. It seemed that he had also gone to bed with his clothes on; that the bed was unaccountably hard; that the pillow had borrowed the characteristics of a pillory.

Sitting up to give these chaotic conclusions a chance to clarify themselves, he was still more bewildered. That which had figured as the blaze of the neglected electrics resolved itself into the morning sun reflecting dazzlingly from the dimpled surface of a woodland lake. The hard bed proved to be a sandy beach; the pillory pillow a gnarled and twisted tree root which had given him a crick in his neck.

Stranded in Arcady

When he put his hand to the cramped neck muscle and moved to escape the bedazzling sun reflection, the changed point of view gave him a shock. Sitting with her back to a tree at a little distance was a strange young woman—strange in the sense that he was sure he had never seen her before. Like himself, she had evidently just awakened, and she was staring at him out of wide-open, slate-gray eyes. In the eyes he saw a vast bewilderment comparable to his own, something of alarm, and a trace of subconscious embarrassment as she put her hands to her hair, which was sadly tumbled.

Prime scrambled to his feet and said, "Good morning"—merely because the conventions, in whatever surroundings, die hard. At this the young woman got up, too, patting and pinning the rebellious hair into subjection.

"Good morning," she returned, quite calmly; and then: "If you—if you live here, perhaps you will be good enough to tell me where I am."

Prime checked a smile. "You beat me to it," he countered affably. "I was about to ask you if you could tell me where *I* am."

The Middle of Nowhere

"Don't you know where you are?" she demanded.

"Only relatively; this charming sylvan environment is doubtless somewhere in America, but, as to the precise spot, I assure you I have no more idea than the man in the moon."

"It's a dream—it must be!" the young woman protested gropingly. "Last night I was in a city—in Quebec."

"So was I," was the prompt rejoinder. Then he felt for his watch, saying: "Wait a moment, let's see if it really was last night."

She waited; and then—"Was it?" she inquired eagerly.

"Yes, it must have been; my watch is still running."

She put her hand to her head. "I can't seem to think very clearly. If we were in Quebec last night, we can't be so very far from Quebec this morning. Can't you—don't you recognize this place at all?"

Prime took his first comprehensive survey of the surroundings. So far as could be seen there was nothing but the lake, with its farther shore dimly visible, and the primeval forest of pine, spruce, fir, and ghostly birch—

Stranded in Arcady

a forest all-enveloping, shadowy, and rather forbidding, even with the summer morning sunlight playing upon it.

"It looks as if we might be a long way from Quebec," he ventured. "I am not very familiar with the Provinces, but these woods——"

She interrupted him anxiously. "A long way? How could it be—in a single night?" Then: "You are giving me to understand that you are not—that you don't know how we come to be here?"

"You must believe that, if you can't believe anything else," he hastened to say. "I don't know where we are, or how we got here, or why we should be here. In other words, I am not the kidnapper; I'm the kidnapped—or at least half of them."

"It seems as if it *must* be a bad dream," she returned, with the frown of perplexity growing between the pretty eyes. "Things like this don't really happen, you know."

"I know they don't, as a rule. I've tried to make them happen, now and then, on paper, but they always seem to lack a good bit in the way of verisimilitude."

The Middle of Nowhere

The young woman turned away to walk down to the lake edge, where she knelt and washed her face and hands, drying them afterward on her handkerchief.

"Well," she asked, coming back to him, "have you thought of anything yet?"

He shook his head. "Honestly, I haven't anything left to think with. That part of my mind has basely escaped. But I have found something," and he pointed to a little heap of provisions and utensils piled at the upper edge of the sand belt: a flitch of bacon, sewn in canvas, a tiny sack of flour, a few cans of tinned things, matches, a camper's frying-pan, and a small coffee-pot. "Whoever brought us here didn't mean that we should starve for a day or two, at least. Shall we breakfast first and investigate afterward?"

"We?" she said. "Can you cook?"

"Not so that any one would notice it," he laughed. "Can you?"

She matched the laugh, and it relieved him mightily. It was her undoubted right as a woman to cry out, or faint, or be foolishly hysterical if she chose; the circum-

Stranded in Arcady

stances certainly warranted anything. But she was apparently waiving her privilege.

"Yes, I ought to be able to cook. When I am at home I teach domestic science in a girls' school. Will you make a fire?"

Prime bestirred himself like a seasoned camper—which was as far as possible from being the fact. There was plenty of dry wood at hand, and a bit of stripped birch bark answered for kindling. The young woman removed her coat and pulled up her sleeves. Prime cut the bacon with his pocket-knife, and, much to the detriment of the same implement, opened a can of peaches. For the bread, Domestic Science wrestled heroically with a lack of appliances; the batter had to be stirred in the tiny skillet with water taken from the lake.

The cooking was also difficult. Being strictly city-bred, neither of them knew enough to let the fire burn down to coals, and they tried to bake the pan-bread over the flames. The result was rather smoky and saddening, and the young woman felt called upon to apologize. But the peaches, fished out of the tin with a sharpened birch

The Middle of Nowhere

twig for a fork, were good, and so was the bacon; and for sauce there was a fair degree of outdoor hunger. Over the breakfast they plunged once more into the mystery.

"Let us try it by the process of elimination," Prime suggested. "First, let me see if I can cancel myself. When I am at home in New York my name is Donald Prime, and I am a perfectly harmless writer of stories. The editors are the only people who really hate me, and you could hardly charge this"—with an arm-wave to include the surrounding wilderness—"to the vindictiveness of an editor, could you?"

He wished to make her laugh again, and he succeeded—in spite of the sad pan-bread.

"Perhaps you have been muck-raking somebody in your stories," she remarked. "But that wouldn't include me. I am even more harmless than you are. My worst enemies are frivolous girls from well-to-do families who think it beneath them to learn to cook scientifically."

"It's a joke," Prime offered soberly; "it can't be anything else." Then: "If we only knew what is expected of us, so that we

Stranded in Arcady

could play up to our part. What is the last thing you remember—in Quebec?"

"The most commonplace thing in the world. I am, or I was, a member of a vacation excursion party of school-teachers. Last evening at the hotel somebody proposed that we go to the Heights of Abraham and see the old battle-field by moonlight."

"And you did it?"

"Yes. After we had tramped all over the place, one of the young women asked me if I wouldn't like to go with her to the head of the cove where General Wolfe and his men climbed up from the river. We went together, and while we were there the young woman stumbled and fell and turned her ankle—or at least she said she did. I took her arm to help her back to the others, and in a little while I began to feel so tired and sleepy that I simply couldn't drag myself another step. That is the last that I remember."

"I can't tell quite such a straight story," said Prime, taking his turn, "but at any rate I shan't begin by telling you a lie. I'm afraid I was—er—drunk, you know."

The Middle of Nowhere

“Tell me,” she commanded, as one who would know the worst.

“I, too, was on my vacation,” he went on. “I was to meet a friend of mine in Boston, and we were to motor together through New England. At the last moment I had a telegram from this friend changing the plan and asking me to meet him in Quebec. I arrived a day or so ahead of him, I suppose; at least, he wasn’t at the hotel where he said he’d be.”

“Go on,” she encouraged.

“I had been there a day and a night, waiting, and, since I didn’t know any one in Quebec, it was becoming rather tiresome. Last evening at dinner I happened to sit in with a big, two-fisted young fellow who confessed that he was in the same boat—waiting for somebody to turn up. After dinner we went out together and made a round of the movies, with three or four cafés sandwiched in between. I drank a little, just to be friendly with the chap, and the next thing I knew I was trying to go to sleep over one of the café tables. I seem to remember that my chance acquaintance got me up and

Stranded in Arcady

headed me for the hotel; but after that it's all a blank."

"Didn't you know any better than to drink with a total stranger?" the young woman asked crisply.

"Apparently I didn't. But the three or four thimblefuls of cheap wine oughtn't to have knocked me out. It was awful stuff; worse than the *vin ordinaire* they feed you in the Paris wine-shops."

"It seems rather suspicious, doesn't it?" she mused; "your sudden sleepiness? Are you—are you used to drinking?"

"Tea," he laughed; "I'm a perfect inebriate with a teapot."

"There must be an explanation of some sort," she insisted. Then: "Can you climb a tree?"

He got up and dusted the sand from his clothes.

"I haven't done it since I used to pick apples in my grandfather's orchard at Batavia, but I'll try," and he left her to go in search of a tree tall enough to serve for an outlook.

The young woman had the two kitchen

The Middle of Nowhere

utensils washed and sand-scoured by the time he came back.

"Well?" she inquired.

"A wild and woolly wilderness," he reported; "just a trifle more of it than you can see from here. The lake is five or six miles wide and perhaps twice as long. There are low hills to the north and woods everywhere."

"And no houses or anything?"

"Nothing; for all I could see, we might be the only two human beings on the face of the earth."

"You seem to be quite cheerful about it," she retorted.

He grinned good-naturedly. "That is a matter of temperament. I'd be grouchy enough if it would do any good. I shall lose my motor trip through New England."

"Think—think hard!" the young woman pleaded. "Since there is no sign of a road, we must have come in a boat; in that case we can't be very far from Quebec. Surely there must be some one living on the shore of a lake as big as this. We must walk until we find a house."

Stranded in Arcady

"We'll do anything you say," Prime agreed; and they set out together, following the lake shore to the left, chiefly because the beach broadened in that direction and so afforded easy walking.

A tramp of a mile northward scarcely served to change the point of view. There was no break in the encircling forest, and at the end of the mile they came to a deeply indented bay, where the continuing shore was in plain view for a doubling of another mile. The search for inhabitants seeming to promise nothing in this direction, they turned and retraced their steps to the breakfast camp, still puzzling over the tangle of mysteries.

"Can't you think of *any* way of accounting for it?" the young woman urged for the twentieth time in the puzzlings.

"I can think of a million ways—all of them blankly impossible," said Prime. "It's simply a chaotic joke!"

The young woman shook her head. "I have lost my sense of humor," she confessed, adding: "I shall go stark, staring mad if we can't find out something!"

The Middle of Nowhere

More to keep things from going from bad to worse than for any other reason, Prime suggested a walk in the opposite direction—southward from the breakfast camp. While they were still within sight of the ashes of the breakfast fire they made a discovery. The loose beach sand was tracked back and forth, and in one place there were scorings as if some heavy body had been dragged. Just beyond the footprints there were wheel tracks, beginning abruptly and ending in the same manner a hundred yards farther along. The wheel tracks were parallel but widely separated, ill-defined in the loose sand but easily traceable.

“A wagon?” questioned the young woman.

“No,” said Prime soberly; “it was—er—it looks as if it might have been an aeroplane.”

II

AMATEUR CASTAWAYS

LUCETTA MILLINGTON—she had told Prime her name on the tramp to the northward—sat down in the sand, elbows on knees and her chin propped in her hands.

"You say 'aeroplane' as if it suggested something familiar to you, Mr. Prime," she prompted.

Truly it did suggest something to Prime, and for a moment his mouth went dry. Grider, the man he was to have met in Quebec, was a college classmate, a harebrained young barbarian, rich, an outdoor fanatic, an owner of fast yachts, a driver of fast cars, and latterly a dabbler in aviatics. Idle enough to be full of extravagant fads and fancies, and wealthy enough to indulge them, this young barbarian made friends of his enemies and enemies of his friends with equal facility—the latter chiefly through the medium of conscienceless practical jokes evolved from a Homeric sense of humor too ruthless to be

Amateur Castaways

appreciated by mere twentieth-century weaklings.

Prime had more than once been the good-natured victim of these jokes, and his heart sank within him. It was plain now that they had both been conveyed to this outlandish wilderness in an aircraft of some sort, and there was little doubt in his mind that Grider had been at the controls.

"It's a—it's a joke, just as I have been trying to tell you," he faltered at length. "We have been kidnapped, and I'm awfully afraid I know the man who did it," and thereupon he gave her a rapid-fire sketch of Grider and Grider's wholly barbarous and irresponsible proclivities.

Miss Millington heard him through without comment, still with her chin in her hands.

"You are standing there and telling me calmly that he did this—this unspeakable thing?" she exclaimed when the tale was told. Then, after a momentary pause: "I am trying to imagine the kind of man who could be so ferociously inhuman. Frankly, I can't, Mr. Prime."

"No, I fancy you can't; I couldn't imagine

Stranded in Arcady

him myself, and I earn my living by imagining people—and things. Grider is in a class by himself. I have always told him that he was born about two thousand years too late. Back in the time of Julius Cæsar, now, they might have appreciated his classic sense of humor."

He stole a glance at the impassive face framed between the supporting palms. It was evident that Miss Millington was freezing silently in a heroic effort to restrain herself from bursting into flames of angry resentment.

"You may enjoy having such a man for your friend," she suggested with chilling emphasis, "but I think there are not very many people who would care to share him with you. Perhaps you have done something to earn the consequences of this wretched joke, but I am sure *I* haven't. Why should he include me?"

Prime suspected that he knew this, too, and he had to summon all his reserves of fortitude before he could bring himself to the point of telling her. Yet it was her due.

Amateur Castaways

"I don't know what you will think of me, Miss Millington, but I guess the truth ought to be told. Grider has always ragged me about my women—er—that is, the women in my stories, I mean. He says they are all alike, and all sticks; merely wooden manikins—womanikins, he calls them—upon which to hang an evening gown. I shouldn't wonder if it were partly true; I don't know women very well."

"Go on," she commanded.

"The last time I was with Grider—it was about two weeks ago—he was particularly obnoxious about the girl in my last bit of stuff—the story that was printed in the *New Era* last month. He said—er—he said I ought to be marooned on some desert island with a woman; that after an experience of that kind I might be able to draw something that wouldn't be a mere caricature of the sex."

At this, as was most natural, Miss Millington's ice melted in a sudden and uncontrollable blaze of indignation.

"Are you trying to tell me that this atrocious friend of yours has taken *me*, a total

Stranded in Arcady

stranger, to complete his cast of characters in this wretched burlesque?" she flashed out.

"I don't wish to believe it," he protested. "It doesn't seem possible for any human being to do such a thing. But I know Grider so well——"

"It is the smallest possible credit to you, Mr. Prime," she snapped. "You ought to be ashamed to have such a man for a friend!"

"I am," he acceded, humbly enough. "Grider weighs about fifty pounds more than I do, and he took three initials in athletics in the university. But I pledge you my word I shall beat him to a frazzle for this when I get the chance."

"A lot of good that does us now!" scoffed the poor victim. And then she got up and walked away, leaving him to stand gazing abstractedly at the wheel tracks of the kidnapping air-machine.

Having lived the unexciting life of a would-be man of letters, Prime had had none of the strenuous experiences which might have served to preface a situation such as this in which he found himself struggling

Amateur Castaways

like a fly in a web. It was absurdly, ridiculously impossible, and yet it existed as a situation to be met and dealt with. Watching the indignant young woman furtively, he saw that she went back to sit down beside the ashes of the breakfast fire, again with her chin in her hands. Meaning to be cautiously prudent, he rolled and smoked a cigarette before venturing to rejoin her, hoping that the lapse of time might clear the air a little.

She was staring aimlessly at the dimpled surface of the lake when he came up and took his place on the opposite side of the ashes. The little heap of provisions gave him an idea and an opening, but she struck in ahead of him.

"Let me know when you expect me to pose for you," she said without turning her head.

"I was an idiot to tell you that!" he exploded. "Can't you understand that that fool suggestion about the desert island and a—er—a woman was Grider's and not mine? How could I know that he would ever be criminal enough to turn it into a fact?"

Stranded in Arcady

"Oh, if you can call it criminal, and really mean it—" she threw out.

"I'll call it anything in the vocabulary if only you won't quarrel with me. Goodness knows, things are bad enough without that!"

She let him see a little more of her face. The frown had disappeared, and there were signs that the storm of indignation was passing.

"I suppose it isn't a particle of use to quarrel," she admitted. "What is done is done and can't be helped, however much we may agree to despise your barbarous friend, Mr. Grider. How is it all going to end?"

At this Prime aired his small idea. "Our provisions won't last more than a day or two; they were evidently not intended to. If that means anything, it means that Grider will come back for us before long. He certainly can't do less."

"To-day?"

"Let us hope so. Have you ever camped out in the woods before?"

"Never."

"Neither have I. What I don't know

Amateur Castaways

about woodcraft would make a much larger book than any I ever hope to write. You probably guessed that when you saw me make the fire."

The corners of the pretty mouth were twitching. "And you probably guessed my part of it when you saw me try to make that dreadful pan-bread. I *can* cook; really I can, Mr. Prime; but when one has been used to having everything imaginable to do it with—"

Prime thought he might venture to laugh once more. "Your revenge is in your own hands; all you have to do is to continue to make the bread. It'll get me in time. My digestion isn't particularly good, you know."

"Do you really think we shall be rescued soon?"

"For the sake of my own sanity, I'm obliged to think it."

"And in the meantime we must sit here and wait?"

"We needn't make the waiting any harder than we are obliged to. Suppose we call it a—er—a sort of surprise-party picnic. I imagine it is no use for us to try to escape.

Stranded in Arcady

Grider probably picked the lonesomest place he knew of."

She fell in with the idea rather more readily than he could have hoped, and it gave him a freshening interest in her. The women he knew best were not so entirely sensible. During what remained of the forenoon they rambled together in the forest, care-free for the moment and postponing the evil day. In such circumstances their acquaintance grew by leaps and bounds, and when they came back to make a renewed attack upon the provisions, the picnic spirit was still in the saddle.

The afternoon was spent in much the same manner; and in the absence of the conventional restraints, a good many harmless confidences were exchanged. Before the day was ended the young woman had heard the moving story of Prime's struggle for a foothold in the field of letters, a struggle which, he was modest enough to say, was still in the making; and in return she had given her own story, which was commonplace enough—so many years of school, so many in a Middle Western coeducational college, two

Amateur Castaways

more of them as a teacher in the girls' school.

"Humdrum, isn't it?" she said. They had made the evening fire, and she was trying to cook two vegetables and the inevitable pan-bread in the one small skillet. "This is my first real adventure. I wish I might know whether I dare enjoy it as much as I'd like to."

"Why not?" he asked.

"Oh, the conventions, I suppose. We can't run fast enough or far enough to get away from them. I am wondering what the senior faculty would say if it could see me just now."

Prime grinned appreciatively. "It would probably shriek and expire."

"Happily it can't see; and to-morrow—surely Mr. Grider will come back for us to-morrow, won't he?"

"We are going to sleep soundly in that comforting belief, anyway. Which reminds me: you will have to have some sort of a place to sleep in. Why didn't I think of that before dark?"

Immediately after supper, and before he would permit himself to roll a cigarette from

Stranded in Arcady

the diminishing supply of precious tobacco, Prime fell upon his problem, immensely willing but prodigiously inexperienced. At first he thought he would build a shack, but the lack of an axe put that out of the question. Round by round, ambition descended the ladder of necessity, and the result was nothing better than a camper's bed of broken pine twigs sheltered and housed in by a sort of bower built from such tree branches as he could break off by main strength.

The young woman did not withhold her meed of praise, especially after she had seen his blistered hands, which were also well daubed with pitch from the pines.

“It’s a shame!” she said. “I ought not to have let you work so hard. If it should happen to rain, you’d need the shelter much more than I should.”

“Why do you say that?”

“You don’t look so very fit,” was the calm reply; “and I *am* fit. Do you know, my one ambition, as a little girl, was to grow up and be an acrobat in a circus?”

“And yet you landed in the laboratory of a girls’ school,” he laughed.

Amateur Castaways

"Not exclusively," she countered quickly. "Last year I was also an assistant in the gymnasium. Swimming was my specialty, but I taught other things as well."

Prime laughed again. "And I can't swim a single stroke," he confessed. "Isn't that a humiliating admission on the part of a man who has lived the greater part of his life in sight of the ocean?"

Miss Millington said she thought it was, and in such gladsome fashion the evening wore away. When it came time to sleep, the lately risen moon lighted the young woman to her bower; and Prime, replenishing the fire, made his bed in the sand, the unwonted exertions of the day and evening putting him to sleep before he had fairly fitted himself to the inequalities of his burrow below the tree roots.

III

SENSIBLE SHOES

THE dawn of the second morning was much like that of the first, cool and crystal clear, and with the sun beating out a pathway of molten gold across the mirror-like surface of the solitary lake.

Prime bestirred himself early, meaning to get the breakfast under way single-handed while Miss Millington slept. But the young woman who had described herself as being "fit" had stolen a march upon him. He was frying the bacon when she came skimming up the beach with her hair flying.

"I got up early and didn't want to disturb you," she told him. "There is a splendid swimming place just around that point; I don't know when I've enjoyed a dip more. Wouldn't you like to try it while I dry my hair and make some more of the homicidal bread?"

Prime went obediently and took the required bath, finding the water bracingly cold

Sensible Shoes

and scarcely shallow enough to be reassuring to a non-swimmer. Over the breakfast which followed, the picnic spirit still presided, though by now it was beginning to lose a little of the lilt. For one thing, the bacon and the pan-bread, though they were ameliorated somewhat by the tinned things, were growing a trifle monotonous; for another, the limitless expanse of lake and sky and forest gave forth no sign of the hoped-for rescue.

After breakfast they made a careful calculation to determine how long their provisions would last. This, too, was unhopeful. With reasonable economy they might eat through another day. Beyond that lay a chance of famine.

"Surely Grider will come back for us to-day," Prime asserted when Domestic Science had done its best in apportioning the supplies. But at this the young woman shook her head doubtfully.

"I have had time to think," she announced. "It is all a guess, you know—this about Mr. Grider—and the more I think of it the more incredible it seems. Consider a moment. To make the kid-

Stranded in Arcady

napping possible we must both have been drugged. That is a serious matter—too serious to have a part in the programme of the most reckless practical joker."

Prime looked up quickly. "I might have been drugged very easily. But you?"

The young woman bared a rounded arm to show a minute red dot half-way between wrist and elbow. "I told you about the young woman who stumbled and turned her ankle: when I took hold of her to help her, something pricked my arm. She said it was a pin in the sleeve of her coat and apologized for having been so careless as to leave it there."

Prime looked closely at the red dot.

"A hypodermic needle?" he suggested.

She nodded. "That is why I became so sleepy. And your potion was put in the wine, which you say tasted so bad."

Prime admitted the deduction without prejudice to his belief that Grider was the arch-plotter, saying: "Grider is quite capable of anything, if the notion appealed to him. And, of course, he must have had hired confederates; he couldn't manage it all alone."

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"Still," she urged, "it seems to me that we ought to be trying to help ourselves in some way. It doesn't seem defensible just to sit here and wait, on the chance that your guess is going to prove true."

Prime laughed. "You are always and most eminently logical. Where shall we begin?"

"At the geography end of it," she replied calmly. "How far could an aeroplane fly in a single night?"

Prime took time to think about it. He had never had occasion to use a long aeroplane flight in any of his stories; hence the special information was lacking. But common sense and a few figures helped out—so many hours, so many miles an hour, total distance so much.

"Two hundred miles, let us say, as an extreme limit," he estimated, and at this the young woman gave a faint little shriek.

"Two hundred miles! Why, that is as far as from Cincinnati to Lake Erie! Surely we can't be that far from Quebec!"

"I merely mentioned that distance as the limit. We are evidently somewhere deep in

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the northern woods. I don't know much about the geography of this region—never having had to stage a story in it—but a lake of this size, with miles of marketable timber on its shores, argues one of two things: it is too far from civilization to have yet tempted the lumbermen, or else it has no outlet large enough to admit of logging operations. You may take your choice."

"But two hundred miles!" she gasped. "If some one doesn't come after us, we shall never get out alive!"

"That is why I think we ought to wait," said Prime quietly.

So they did wait throughout the entire forenoon, sitting for the most part under the shade of the shore trees, killing time and talking light-heartedly against the grim conclusion that each passing hour was forcing upon them. They contrived to keep it up to and through the noonday *séance* with the cooking fire; but after that the barriers, on the young woman's part, went out with a rush.

"I simply can't stand it any longer," she protested. "We must do something, Mr.

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Prime. We can at least walk somewhere and carry the bits of provisions along with us. Why should we stay right in this one spot until we starve?"

"I am still clinging to the Grider supposition," Prime admitted. "If we move away from here he might not be able to find us."

"It is only a supposition," she countered quickly. "You accept it, but, while I haven't anything better to offer, I cannot make it seem real."

"If you throw Grider out of it, it becomes an absolutely impossible riddle."

"I know; but everything is impossible. We are awake and alive and lost, and these are the only facts we can be sure of." Then she added: "It will be so much easier to bear if we are only doing something!"

Prime had an uncomfortable feeling that a move would be a definite abandonment of the only reasonable hope; but he had no further argument to adduce, and the preparations for the move were quickly made. Though the young woman was the disbeliever in the Grider hypothesis, it was at her suggestion that Prime wrote a note on the back

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of a pocket-worn letter and left it sticking in a cleft stake by the waterside; the note advertising the direction they were about to take. They had no plan other than to try to find the lake's outlet, and to this end they laid their course southward along the shore, dividing the small "tote-load" of dunnage at the young woman's insistence.

So long as they had the sandy lake margin for a path, the going was easy, but in a little time the beach disappeared in a rocky shore, with the forest crowding closely upon the water, and they were forced to make a long circuit inland. Still having the protective instinct, Prime "broke trail" handsomely for his companion, but, since he was something less than an athlete, the long afternoon of it told upon him severely; so severely, indeed, that he was glad to throw himself down upon the sands to rest when they finally came back to the lake on the shore of a narrow bay.

"I didn't know before how much I lacked of being a real man," he admitted, stretching himself luxuriously upon his back to stare up into the sunset sky. Then, as if it had just

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occurred to him: "Say—it must have been something fierce for you."

"I am all right," was the cheerful reply. "But I shall never get over being thankful that I put on a pair of sensible shoes, night before last, to walk to the Heights of Abraham."

After he had rested and was beginning to grow stiff, Prime sat up.

"We can't go much farther before dark; shall we camp here?" he asked.

The young woman shook her head. "We can't see anything from here; it is so shut in. Can't we go on a little farther?"

"Sure," Prime assented, scrambling up and stooping to rub the stiffness out of his calves, and at this the aimless march was renewed, to end definitely a few minutes later at the intake of a stream flowing silently out of the lake to the southeastward; a stream narrow and not too swift, but sufficiently deep to bar their way.

Twilight was stealing softly through the shadowy aisles of the forest when they prepared to camp at the lake-shore edge of the wood. Prime made the camp-fire, and, since

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the lake water was a little roiled at the outlet mouth, he took one of the empty fruit-tins and crossed the neck of land to the river. Working his way around a thicket of under-growth, he came upon the stream at a point where the little river, as if gathering itself for its long journey to the sea, spread away in a quiet and almost currentless reach.

Climbing down the bank to fill the tin, he found a startling surprise lying in wait for him. Just below the overhanging bank a large birch-bark canoe, well filled with dunnage, was drawn out upon a tiny beach. His first impulse was to rush back to his companion with the good news that their rescue was at hand; the next was possibly a hand-down from some far-away Indian-dodging ancestor: perhaps it would be well first to find out into whose hands they were going to fall.

The canoe itself told him nothing, and neither did the lading, which included a good store of eatables. There was an air of isolation about the birch-bark which gave him the feeling that it had been beached for some time, and the dry paddles lying inside

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confirmed the impression. He listened, momentarily expecting to hear sounds betraying the presence of the owners, but the silence of the sombre forest was unbroken save by the lapping of the little wavelets on the near-by lake shore.

Realizing that Miss Millington would be waiting for her bread-mixing water, Prime filled the tin and recrossed the small peninsula.

"I was beginning to wonder if you were lost," said the bread-maker. "Did you have to go far?"

"No, not very far." Then, snatching at the first excuse that offered: "I saw some berries on the river-bank. Let me have the tin again and I'll see if I can't gather a few before it grows too dark."

Having thus given a plausible reason for a longer absence, he went back to the canoe to look in the fading light for tracks in the sand. Now that he made a business of searching for them, he found plenty of them; heelless tracks as if the feet that had made them had been shod with moccasins. A little farther down the stream-side there were broken

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bushes and a small earth-slide to show where somebody had scrambled up to the forest level. Following the trail he soon found himself in a natural clearing, grass-grown and running back from the river a hundred yards or more. In the centre of this clearing he came upon the ashes of five separate fires, disposed in the form of a rude cross.

Still there was no sign of the canoe-owners themselves, and the discovery of the curiously arranged ash-heaps merely added more mystery to mystery. The fires had been dead for some time. Of this Prime assured himself by thrusting his hand into the ashes. Clearly the camp, if it were a camp, had been abandoned for some hours at least. The gathering dusk warned him that it would be useless to try to track the fire-makers, and he turned to make his way back to the lake shore and supper.

It was in the edge of the glade, under the gloomy shadow of a giant spruce, that he stumbled blindly over some reluctantly yielding obstacle and fell headlong. Regaining his feet quickly with a nameless fear unnerving him, he stooped and groped under the shad-

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owing tree, drawing back horror-stricken when his hand came in contact with the stiffened arm of a corpse.

He had matches in his pocket, and he found one and lighted it. His hand shook so that the match went out and he had to light another. By the brief flare of the second match he saw a double horror. Lying in a little depression between two spreading roots of the spruce were the bodies of two men locked in a death-grip. Another match visualized the tragedy in all its ghastly details. The men were apparently Indians, or half-breeds, and it had been a duel to the death, fought with knives.

IV

IN THE NIGHT

PRIME made his way to the camp-fire at the lake edge, a prey to many disturbing emotions. Having lived a life practically void of adventure, the sudden collision with bloody tragedy shocked him prodigiously. Out of the welter of emotions he dug a single fixed and unalterable decision. Come what might, his companion must be kept from all knowledge of the duel and its ghastly outcome.

"Dear me! You look as if you had seen a ghost," was the way the battle of concealment was opened when he came within the circle of firelight. "Did you find any berries?"

Prime shook his head. "No, it was too dark," he said; "and, anyway, I'm not sure there were any."

"Never mind," was the cheerful rejoinder. "We have enough without them, and, really, I am beginning to get the knack of the pan-

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bread. If you don't say it is better this evening—" She broke off suddenly. He had sat down by the fire and was nursing his knees to keep them from knocking together. "Why, what *is* the matter with you? You are as pale as a sheet."

"I—I stumbled over something and fell down," he explained hesitantly. "It wasn't much of a fall, but it seemed to shake me up a good bit. I'll be all right in a minute or two."

"You are simply tired to death," she put in sympathetically. "The long tramp this afternoon was too much for you."

Prime resented the sympathy. He was not willing to admit that he could not endure as much as she could—as much as any mere woman could.

"I'm not especially tired," he denied; and to prove it he began to eat as if he were hungry, and to talk, and to make his companion talk, of things as far as possible removed from the sombre heart of a Canadian forest.

Immediately after supper he began to build another sleeping-shelter, though the

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young woman insisted that it was ridiculous for him to feel that he was obliged to do this at every fresh stopping-place. None the less, he persevered, partly because the work relieved him of the necessity of trying to keep up appearances. Fortunately, Miss Millington confessed herself weary enough to go to bed early, and after she left him Prime sat before the fire, smoking the dust out of his tobacco-pouch and formulating his plan for the keeping of the horrid secret.

The plan was simple enough, asking only for time and a sufficient quantity—and quality—of nerve. When he could be sure that his camp-mate was safely asleep he would go back to the glade and dispose of the two dead men in some way so that she would never know of their existence alive or dead.

The waiting proved to be a terrific strain; the more so since the conditions were strictly compelling. The chance to secure the ownerless and well-stocked canoe was by no means to be lost, but Prime saw difficulties ahead. His companion would wish to know a lot of things that she must not be told, and he

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was well assured that she would have to be convinced of their right to take the canoe before she would consent to be an accomplice in the taking. This meant delay, which in its turn rigidly imposed the complete effacement of all traces of the tragedy. He was waiting to begin the effacement.

By the time his tobacco was gone he was quivering with a nervous impatience to be up and at it and have it over with. After the crackling fire died down the forest silence was unbroken. The young woman was asleep; he could hear her regular breathing. But the time was not yet ripe. The moon had risen, but it was not yet high enough to pour its rays into the tree-sheltered glade, and without its light to aid him the horrible thing he had to do would be still more horrible.

It was nearly midnight when he got up from his place beside the whitening embers of the camp-fire and pulled himself together for the grawsome task. Half-way to the glade a fit of trembling seized him and he had to sit down until it passed. It was immensely humiliating, and he lamented the

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carefully civilized pre-existence which had left him so helplessly unable to cope with the primitive and the unusual.

When he reached the glade and the big spruce the moon was shining full upon the two dead men. One of them had a crooking arm locked around the neck of the other. Prime's gorge rose when he found that he had to strain and tug to break the arm-grip, and he had a creeping shock of horror when he discovered that the gripped throat had a gaping wound through which the man's life had fled. In the body of the other man he found a retaliatory knife, buried to the haft, and it took all his strength to withdraw it.

With these unnerving preliminaries fairly over, he went on doggedly, dragging the bodies one at a time to the river-brink. Selecting the quietest of the eddies, and making sure of its sufficient depth by sounding with a broken tree limb, he began a search for weighting-stones. There were none on the river-bank, and he had to go back to the lake shore for them, carrying them an armful at a time.

The weighting process kept even pace

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with the other ghastly details. The men both wore the belted coats of the northern guides, and he first tried filling the pockets with stones. When this seemed entirely inadequate he trudged back to the abandoned canoe and secured a pair of blankets from its lading. Of these he made a winding-sheet for each of the dead men, wrapping the stones in with the bodies, and making all fast as well as he could with strings fashioned from strips of the blanketing.

All this took time, and before it was finished, with the two stiffened bodies settling to the bottom of the deep pool, Prime was sick and shaken. What remained to be done was less distressing. Going back to the glade he searched until he found the other hunting-knife. Also, in groping under the murder tree he found a small buckskin sack filled with coins. A lighted match showed him the contents—a handful of bright English sovereigns. The inference was plain; the two men had fought for the possession of the gold, and both had lost.

Prime went back to the river and, kneeling at the water's edge, scoured the two

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knives with sand to remove the blood-stains. That done, and the knives well hidden in the bow of the canoe, he made another journey to the glade and carefully scattered the ashes of the five fires.

Owing to the civilized pre-existence, he was fagged and weary to the point of collapse when he finally returned to the campfire on the lake beach and flung himself down beside it to sleep. But for long hours sleep would not come, and when it did come it was little better than a succession of hideous nightmares in which two dark-faced men were reproachfully throttling him and dragging him down into the bottomless depths of the outlet river.

V

A SECRET FOR ONE

PRIME awoke unrefreshed at the moment when the morning sun was beginning to gild the tops of the highest trees, to find his camp-mate up and busying herself housewifely over the breakfast fire.

"You looked so utterly tired and worn out I thought I'd let you sleep as long as you could," she offered. "Are you feeling any better this morning?"

"I'm not sick," he protested, wincing a little in spite of himself in deference to the stiffened thews and sinews.

"You mustn't be," she argued cheerfully. "To-day is the day when we must go back a few thousand years and become Stone-Age people."

"Meaning that the provisions will be gone?"

"Yes."

"There are rabbits," he asserted. "I saw

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two of them yesterday. Does the domestic-science course include the cooking of rabbits *au voyageur?*"

"It is going to include the cooking of anything we can find to cook. Does the literary course include the catching of rabbits with one's bare hands?"

"It includes an imagination which is better than the possession of many traps and weapons," he jested. "I feel it in my bones that we are not going to starve."

"Let us be thankful to your bones," she returned gayly, and at this Prime felt the grisly night and its horrors withdrawing a little way.

There was more of the cheerful badinage to enliven the scanty breakfast, but there was pathos in the air when Prime felt for his cigarette-papers and mechanically opened his empty tobacco-pouch.

"You poor man!" she cooed, pitying him.
"What will you do now?"

Prime had a thought which was only partly regretful. He might have searched in the pockets of the dead men for more tobacco, but it had not occurred to him at

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the time. He dismissed the thought and came back to the playing of his part in the secret for one.

"The lack of tobacco is a small consideration, when there is so much else at stake," he maintained. "If the Grider guess is the right one, it is evident that something has turned up to tangle it. Unscrupulous as he is in the matter of idiotic jokes, I know him well enough to be sure that he wouldn't leave us here to famish. He is only an amateur aviator, and it is quite within the possibilities that he has wrecked himself somewhere. It seems to me that we ought to take this river for a guide and push on for ourselves. Doesn't it appeal that way to you?"

"If we only had a boat of some kind," she sighed. "But even then we couldn't push very far without something to eat."

It was time to usher in the glad surprise, and Prime began to gather up the breakfast leavings. "We'll go over and have a look at the river, anyway," he suggested, and a few minutes later he had led the way across the point of land, and had heard the young

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woman's cry of delight and relief when she discovered the stranded canoe.

"You knew about this all the time," was her reproachful accusation. "You were over here last night. That is why you had the prophetic bones a little while ago. Why didn't you tell me before?"

He grinned. "At the moment you seemed cheerful enough without the addition of the good news. Do you know what is in that canoe?"

"No."

"Things to eat," he avouched solemnly; "lots of them! More than we could eat in a month."

"But they are not ours," she objected.

"No matter; we are going to eat them just the same."

"You mean that we can hire the owners to take us out of this wilderness? Have you any money?"

"Plenty of it," he boasted, chinking the buckskin bag in his pocket, the finding of which he had, up to this moment, entirely forgotten.

"But where are the owners? I don't see any camp."

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"That is one reason why I didn't tell you last night. I found the canoe, but I didn't find anything that looked—er—like a camp."

"Then we shall have to sit down patiently and wait until they come back. They wouldn't go very far away and leave a loaded canoe alone like this, would they?"

Prime gave a furtive side glance at the shadowy pool in the eddy. Truly the canoe-owners had not gone very far, but it was quite far enough. If he could have framed any reasonable excuse for it, he would have urged the immediate borrowing of the canoe, and an equally immediate departure from the spot of grisly associations. Indeed, he did go so far as to suggest it, and was brought up standing, as he more than half expected to be, against Miss Millington's conscience.

"Why, certainly we couldn't do anything like that!" she protested. "It would be highway robbery! We must wait until they return. Surely they won't be gone very long."

There was no help for it except in telling her the shocking truth, and Prime was not equal to that. So he reconciled himself as

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best he could to the enforced delay, hoping that the tender conscience would not demand too much time.

Almost at once the owner of the conscience suggested that they make a round through the adjoining forest in an attempt to discover the camp of the missing men. Prime acceded cheerfully enough, though he was impatient to examine the canoe-load, in which he was hoping there might prove to be a supply of tobacco. For the better part of the forenoon they quartered the forest around and about between the river and the lake in widening circles, missing nothing but the glade of horrors, which Prime took good care to avoid. At noon they came back to the canoe-landing and made a frugal meal on the remains of their own store of food.

"We are too punctiliously foolish," Prime declared when the second meal without its tobacco aftermath had been endured. "You say we are obliged to wait, and in that case we shall have to borrow, sooner or later. I don't see any reason why we shouldn't begin it now. We can explain everything, you

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know; and, besides, I have money with which to pay for what we take."

"But your money isn't Canadian money," was the ready objection voiced by the tender conscience.

Prime's laugh did not ring quite true. "That is where you are mistaken," he retorted. "It is good English gold, in sovereigns."

If the young woman were surprised to learn that a man who had expected to motor out of Canada in a day or two at the most had supplied himself with a stock of English sovereigns, she did not question the fact. But for fear she might, Prime went on hastily:

"I always like to be prepared for all kinds of emergencies when I leave home, and this time I wasn't sure just where I was going to bring up, you know—after Grider had changed his mind as to our starting-point."

The evasion served its purpose, and the young woman assented to an immediate examination of the canoe-load. Prime helped her down the steep bank, and they began to rummage, spreading their findings out on

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the little beach. As Prime had intimated, there was a liberal stock of provisions—jerked deer-meat, smoke-cured bacon, flour, meal, salt, baking-powder, tea, and sugar, but no coffee, a few tins of vegetables, a small sack of potatoes, and, last but not least, a canvas-covered mass of something which they decided was pemmican.

Rummaging further, the precious tobacco came to light—two huge twists of it hidden in the centre of one of the two remaining blanket-rolls. Prime stopped right where he was, crumbled a bit of the dried leaf in his hands, and made a cigarette, his companion looking on with a little lip-curl which might have been of derision or merely of amusement.

“Is it good?” she asked, when he had inhaled the first deep breath.

“It’s vile!” he returned. “At the same time, it is so much better than nothing that I could do a Highland fling for pure joy. Take my advice, Miss Millington, and never become a slave to the tobacco habit.”

“‘Miss Millington,’ ” she repeated, half musingly. “Doesn’t that strike you as being



"Is it good?" she asked, when he had inhaled the first deep breath.

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a trifle absurd at this distance from a drawing-room?"

"It surely does," he admitted frankly; "and so, for that matter, does 'Mr. Prime.' "

She looked up at him with a charming little grimace.

"I'll concede the 'Lucetta' if you will concede the 'Donald.' "

"It's a go," he laughed. "It is the last of the conventions, and we'll tell it good-by without a whimper." With the goodly array of foodstuff spread out upon the sand, and with his back carefully turned upon the pool of dread, he felt that he could afford to be light-hearted.

There was only a little more of the rummaging to be done. A canvas-covered roll unashed from its place beneath a canoe-stay proved to be a square of duck large enough to make a small sleeping-tent. Inside of this roll there was an ample stock of cartridges for the two repeating rifles lying cased in their canvas covers in the bottom of the boat, and an Indian-tanned deerskin used as a wrapping for the ammunition. With the guns there was a serviceable woods-

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man's axe. In the bow, where Prime had dropped the two savage-looking hunting-knives, there were a few utensils: a teapot, a camper's skillet large enough to be worth while, tin cup and plates, an empty whiskey-bottle, and a basin—the latter presumably for the dough-mixing.

After they had their findings lying on the sand the tender conscience came in play again, and nothing would do but everything must be put back just as they had found it, Prime drawing the line, however, at a portion of the tobacco and enough of the food to serve for supper and breakfast. During the remainder of the afternoon they left the canoe-load undisturbed, but when evening came Prime borrowed the basin, the cups, plates, and the larger skillet. Farther along he borrowed the canvas roll and the axe and set up the tiny sleeping-tent, placing it so that Lucetta, if she were so minded, could see the fire.

Just before she retired the young woman made a generous protest.

"You mustn't do all the borrowing for me," she insisted. "Go right down there

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and get one of those blanket-rolls for yourself. I shan't sleep a wink if you don't."

The next morning there were more speculations, on the young woman's part, as to the whereabouts of the canoe-owners, with much wonderment at their protracted absence and the singular abandonment of their entire outfit, even to the weapons. Whereat Prime invented all sorts of theories to account for this curious state of affairs, all of them much more ingenious than plausible.

For himself, the mystery was scarcely less unexplainable. Why two men, evidently outfitted for a long journey, should stop by the way, build five fires that were plainly not camp-fires, and then fall to and fight each other to death over a bag of English sovereigns, were puzzles that he did not attempt to solve in his own behalf. It was enough that the facts had befallen, and that the net result for a pair of helpless castaways was a well-stocked canoe which Lucetta's acid-proof honesty was still preventing them from appropriating.

After a breakfast served with the garnishings afforded by the Heaven-sent supplies,

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Prime uncased the two rifles and looked them over. They were United States products of an early edition, but were apparently serviceable and in good order. In the canvas case of one of the guns there was a packet of fish-lines and hooks. At Lucetta's suggestion a few shots were fired as a signal for the lost canoe-owners. Nothing coming of this, they tried a little target practice, selecting the largest tree in sight for a mark, and both missing it with monotonous regularity. Later in the day Prime brought the talk around by degrees to the expediencies. How much of the present good weather must they waste in waiting for the hypothetical return of the absentees? Perhaps some accident had happened; perhaps the absentees would never turn up. Who could tell?

Domestic Science, with gymnasium-teaching on the side, fought the suggestion to which all this pointed. They had no manner of right to take the canoe and its belongings without the consent of the owners. What was the hurry? By waiting they would be sure to obtain the help they were needing, and another day or two must certainly end the suspense.

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Prime went as far as he could without telling the shocking truth. With the dead men's pool so near at hand he was shudderingly anxious to be gone, but the young woman's logic was unanswerable and the delay was extended. A single small advance marked this second day. Along toward evening Prime unloaded the canoe, and together they made a few heroic attempts to acquire the art of paddling. It was apparently a lost art so far as they were concerned. The big birch-bark, lightened of its load, did everything but what it was expected to do, yawning and careening under the unskilful handling in a most disconcerting manner.

"If I could only rig up some way to row the thing!" Prime exclaimed, when they had contrived to drift and seesaw half a mile or more down the almost currentless first reach of the stream.

"You couldn't," asserted the more practical young woman. "The sides are as thin as paper, and they wouldn't hold rowlocks if you could make them. Besides, who ever heard of rowing a birch-bark canoe?"

"Somebody will hear of it, if I ever live

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to work this vacation trip of ours into a story— No, no; paddle the other way! We want to turn around and go back!"

They got the hang of it a little better after a while, the young woman catching the knack first; and after much labor they won back to their camping-place on the small peninsula. Over the evening fire Prime unwrapped the deerskin they had found in the canvas-roll.

"We shall have to have moccasins of some sort," he announced. "That flimsy boat isn't going to stand for shoes with heels on them. Does domestic science include a semester in shoemaking? I can assure you in advance that literature doesn't."

Lucetta took the leather and sat for a time regarding it thoughtfully. "No needle, no thread, no pattern," she mused. "And if we cut it and spoil it there won't be enough left for two pairs."

"If you have an idea, try it; I'll stand the expense of the leather," chuckled Prime, with large liberality.

But now the young woman was hesitating on another score.

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"This leather belongs to the owners of the canoe; I don't know that we have any right to cut it," she objected.

Prime was tempted to say things objurgatory of these phantom owners who would not down, but he didn't. Every fresh reference to the two dead men gave him an impulse to glance over his shoulder at the silent pool in the eddy, and the longer the thing went on the less able he was to control the prompting.

"You forget that we are able to pay for all damages," was what he really did say, and at that the young woman removed a shoe, placed a neatly stockinged foot on the skin and marked around it with a bit of charcoal taken from the fire, leaving a generous margin. Borrowing Prime's pocket-knife she cut to the line, made tiny buttonholes all around the piece, and threaded them with a drawing-string made of the soft leather.

"You've got it!" exclaimed the unskilled one in open-eyed admiration, after the one-piece slipper was fashioned and tried on. "You are a wonder! I shouldn't have thought of that in a month of Sundays. It's capital!"

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There was enough material in the single skin to make the two pairs, with something left over, and Prime put his on at once with a sigh of relief born of the grateful chance to get rid of the civilized shoes. Past that there was more talk about the ever-thickening mysteries, and again Lucetta refused to accept the Grider explanation, while Prime clung to it simply because he could not invent any other. Yet it was borne in upon him that the mystery was edging away from the Grider hypothesis in spite of all he could do. There was nothing to connect the two canoemen, fighting over the purse of gold, with Grider, or with the abduction of a school-teacher and a writer of stories; yet there were pointings here, too, if one might read them. Why were the five fires lighted in the glade unless it were for a signal of some sort? Prime wished from the bottom of his heart that he could set the keen mentality of his companion at work on this latest phase of the mystery, but with the dead men lying stiff and still at the bottom of their pool less than a stone's throw away, his courage failed him and his lips were sealed.

VI

CANOEDLINGS

ON the fifth morning—their third at the peninsula camp—Prime registered a solemn vow to make this the last day of the entirely unnecessary delay. More and more he was tormented by the fear that the dead men might escape from their weightings and rise to become a menace to Lucetta's sanity or his own; and, though he had been given the best possible proof that his companion was above reproach in the matter of calm courage and freedom from hysteria, he meant to take no chances—for her or for himself.

At his suggestion they began the day by making another essay at the paddling, embarking in the emptied canoe shortly after breakfast. Gaining a little facility after an hour or so, they headed the birch-bark downstream past the point which they had reached the previous afternoon, and soon found themselves in a quickening current. Prime, kneeling in the bow, gave the word, and Lucetta obeyed it.

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"We'll try the quick water," he flung back to her. "We'll have to have the experience, and we had better get it with the empty canoe, rather than with the load."

This seemed logical, but it led to results. In a short time the shores grew rocky and there was no safe place to land. Moreover, the little river was now running so swiftly that they were afraid to try to turn around. Rapid after rapid was passed in vain struggles to stop the triumphal progress, and if the canoe's lading had been aboard, Prime would have been entirely happy, since every rapid they shot was taking them farther away from the scene of the tragedy. But the lading was not aboard.

"We've got to do something to head off this runaway!" the Bowman shouted back over his shoulder in one of the quieter race-ways. "We're leaving our commissary behind."

"Anything you say," chimed in the steerswoman from the stern of the dancing runaway. "My knees are getting awfully tired, but I can stand it as long as you can."

"That is the trouble," Prime called back.

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"We're staying with it too long. The next pool we come to, you paddle like mad, all on one side, and I'll do the same. We've simply *got* to turn around!"

The manœuvre worked like a charm. A succession of the eddy-pools came rushing up from down-stream, and in the third of them they contrived to get the birch-bark reversed and pointed up-stream. Then it suddenly occurred to the young woman that they had had their trouble for nothing; that the same end might have been gained if they had merely turned themselves around and faced the other way. Her shriek of laughter made Prime stop paddling for the moment.

"I need a guardian—we both need guardians!" he snorted, when she told him what she was laughing at, and then they dug their paddles in a frantic effort to stem the swift current.

It was no go—less than no go. In spite of all they could do the birch-bark refused to be driven up-stream. What was worse, it began to drift backward, slowly at first, but presently at a pace which made them quickly turn to face the other way lest they

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be smashed in a rapid. A mile or more fled to the rear before they could take breath, and two more rapids were passed, up which Prime knew they could never force the canoe with any skill they possessed or were likely to acquire.

Taking advantage of the next lull in the unmanageable flight, he shouted again.

"We'll have to go ashore! We are getting so far away now that we shall never get back. You're steering: try it in the next quiet place we come to, and I'll do all I can to help."

The "next quiet place" proved to be a full half-mile farther along, and they had a dozen hairbreadth escapes in more of the quick stretches before they reached it. Prime lived years in moments in the swifter rushes. Knowing his own helplessness in the water, he was in deadly fear of a capsize, not from any unmanly dread of death but because he had a vivid and unnerving picture of Lucetta's predicament if she should escape and be left alone and helpless in the heart of the forest wilderness. He drew his first good breath after the runaway canoe had been safely beached on the shore of an eddy and they

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had tottered carefully out of it to drag it still higher upon the shelving bank.

"My heavens!" he panted, throwing himself down to gasp at leisure. "I wouldn't go through that again for a farm in Paradise! Weren't you scared stiff?"

"I certainly was," was the frank admission. The young woman had taken her characteristic attitude, sitting down with her chin propped in her hands.

"But, just the same, you didn't forget to paddle!" Prime exulted. "You are a comrade, right, Lucetta! It's a thousand pities you aren't a man!"

"Isn't it?" she murmured, without turning her head.

"Do you know—I was simply paralyzed at the thought of what would happen if we should upset—not so much at the thought of what would be certain to happen to me, but on your account."

"The protective instinct," she remarked; "it is like a good many other things which we have outgrown—or are outgrowing—quite useless, but stubbornly persistent."

"You mean that you don't need it?"

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"I haven't needed it yet, have I?"

"No," he admitted soberly. "So far, you have had the nerve, and more than your share of the physique."

"I have had better training, perhaps," she offered, as if willing to make it easier for him. "A little farther along you will begin to develop, while I shall stand still."

But Prime would not let it rest at that.

"I have always maintained that most women have a finer nerve, and finer courage, than most men; I am speaking now of the civilized average. You are proving my theory, and I owe you something. But to get back to things present; doesn't it occur to you that we have gotten ourselves into a rather awkward mess?"

"It does, indeed. We must be miles from anything to eat, and if you know of any way to take this canoe up-stream I wish you would tell me; I don't."

"It will be by main strength and awkwardness, as the Irishman played the cornet, if we do it at all," Prime decided.

"And if, in the meantime, the owners come back and find it gone——"

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Prime got up stiffly. "I have a feeling that they haven't come back yet, and it is growing fast into a feeling that they are not going to come back at all. Shall we try a towing stunt?"

They tried it, though they had no tow-line and were reduced to the necessity of dragging the canoe along in the shallows, each with a hand on the gunwale. This did not answer very well, and after fighting for a half-hour in the first of the rapids and getting thoroughly wet and bedraggled they had to give it up and reverse the process, letting the birch-bark drift down to the safe dockage again.

While they were resting from their labors, and the hampered half of the towing squad was wringing the water from her skirts, Prime looked at his watch.

"Heavens and earth!" he exclaimed. "It is noon already! I thought I was beginning to feel that way inside. Why didn't we have sense enough to take a bite along with us when we left camp this morning?"

"Oh, if you are going into the whys, why didn't we have sense enough to know that

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we couldn't handle the canoe? How far have we come?"

Prime shook his head. "You couldn't prove it by me. A part of the time it seemed to me that we were bettering a mile a minute." He got up and hobbled back and forth on the little beach to work the canoe-cramp out of his knees. "It looks to me as if we are up against it good and hard; the canoe is here, and the dunnage is up yonder. Which do we do: carry the canoe to the dunnage, or the dunnage to the canoe? It's a heavenly choice either way around. What do you say?"

Lucetta voted at once for the canoe-carrying, if it were at all possible. So much, she said, they owed to the owners, who had every right to expect to find their property where they had left it. Again Prime was tempted to say hard things about the ghosts which so stubbornly refused to be laid, and again he denied himself.

"The canoe it is," he responded grimly, but by the time they had dragged the light but unwieldy craft out of the water and part way up the bank they were convinced that the other alternative was the only one. A

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short portage they might have made, or possibly a long one, if they had known enough to turn the birch-bark bottom-side up and carry it on their heads *voyageur*-fashion. But they still had this to learn.

"It's a frost," was Prime's decision after they had tugged and stumbled a little way with the clumsy burden knocking at their legs. "The mountain won't go to Mohammed—that much is perfectly plain. Are you game for a long portage with the camp outfit? It seems to be the only thing there is left for us to do."

The young woman was game, and since they were on the wrong side of the river they put the canoe into the water again and paddled to the other side, leaving the birch-bark drawn out upon the bank of the eddy-pool. From that they went on, hunger urging them and the water-softened moccasins holding them back and making them pick their way like children in the first few days of the barefoot season. The distance proved to be about three miles and they made it in something over an hour. The embers of their morning fire were still alive, and the

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belated midday meal was quickly cooked and despatched.

"Now for the hard part of it," Prime announced, as he began to pack the camp outfit. "You sit right still and rest, and I'll get things ready for the tote."

"Then you have determined to ride roughshod over the rights of the people who own the things?" the young woman asked.

Prime turned his back deliberately upon the pool of dread.

"Necessity knows no law, and we can't stay here forever waiting for something to turn up. Somebody has given us a strong-hand deal, for what reason God only knows, and we've got to fight out of it the best way we can. We'll take these things, and we are willing to pay for them if anybody should ask us to; but in any event we are going to take them, because it is a matter of life and death to us. I'll shoulder all the responsibility, moral and otherwise."

She laughed a little at this. "More of the protective instinct? I can't allow that —my conscience is my own. But I suppose you are right. There doesn't seem to be

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anything else to do. And you needn't fit all of those packs to your own back; I propose to carry my share."

He protested at that, and learned one more thing about Lucetta Millington: up to a certain point she was as docile and leadable as the woman of the Stone Age is supposed to have been, and beyond that she was adamant.

"You said a little while ago it was a pity I wasn't a man: it is the woman's part nowadays to ask no odds. Will you try to remember that?"

Here was a hint of a brand-new Lucetta, and Prime wondered how he had contrived to live twenty-eight years in a world of women only to be brought in contact for the first time with the real, simon-pure article in the heart of a Canadian wilderness. Nevertheless he took her at her word and made a small pack for her, with a carrying-strap cut from the remains of the deerskin. At the very best the portage promised to demand three trips, which was appalling.

It was well past the middle of the afternoon when they reached the canoe at the

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end of the first carry. The three-mile trudge had been made in silence, neither of the amateur carriers having breath to spare for talk. Since they had the tent and one of the blanket-rolls and sufficient food, Prime was for putting off the remaining double carry to another day, but again Lucetta was adamant.

"If we do that we shall lose all day tomorrow," was the form her protest took; "and now that we have started we had better keep on going."

"Oh, what is the frantic hurry?" Prime cut in. "You said your school didn't begin until September. Haven't we the entire, unspoiled summer ahead of us?"

"Clothes," she remarked briefly. "Yours may last all summer, but mine won't—not if we have to go on tramping through the woods every day."

Prime's laugh was a shout. "We'll be blanket Indians, both of us, before we get out of this. I feel that in my bones, too. But about the second carry; we'll make it if you say so. It will at least give us a good appetite for supper."

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They made it, reaching the end of the six-mile doubling a short while before the late sunset. Prime was all in, down, and out, but he would not admit it until after the supper had been eaten and the shelter-tent set up over its bed of spruce-tips. Then he let go with both hands.

"I'm dog-tired, and I am not ashamed to admit it," he confessed. "But you—you look as fresh as a daisy. What are you made of—spring steel?"

"Not by any manner of means; but I wasn't going to be the first to say anything. I feel as if I were slowly ossifying. I wouldn't walk another mile to-night for a fortune."

Prime stretched himself lazily before the fire with his hands under his head. "Luckily, you don't have to. You had better turn in and get all the sleep that is coming to you. I'm going to hit the blankets after I smoke another pinch of this horrible tobacco."

As he sat up to roll the pinch a rising wind began to swish through the tree-tops. A little later there was a fitful play of lightning followed by a muttering of distant thunder.

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"That means rain, and you are going to get wet," said the young woman, as she was preparing to creep under her canvas. An instant later a gusty blast came down the river, threatening to scatter the fire. Prime sprang up at once and began to take the necessary precautions against a conflagration. In the midst of the haste-making he heard his companion say: "We might drag the canoe up here and turn it over so that you could have it for a shelter."

With the fire safely banked they went together to the river's edge to carry out her suggestion. By this time the precursor blast of the shower was lashing the little river into foam, and the spray from the rapid just above them wet their faces. One glance, lightning assisted, at the little beach where they had drawn up the canoe was enough. The birch-bark was gone.

The young woman was the first to find speech. At another lightning-flash she cried out quickly:

"There it is! Don't you see it?—going down the river! The wind is blowing it away!"

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Immediately they dashed off in pursuit, stumbling through the forest in darkness, which, between the lightning-flashes, was like a blanketing of invisibility. The race was a short one. One flash showed them the canoe dancing down the raceway of a lower rapid, and at the next it had disappeared.

VII

ROULANT MA BOULE

AT the disappearance of the canoe Prime called the halt which the black darkness was insisting upon, and they made their way back in the teeth of the storm to the camp-fire. In a few minutes the summer squall had blown itself out, with scarcely enough rain to make a drip from the trees. Weary as he was, Prime took the axe, searched until he found a pine stump, and from it hewed the material for a couple of torches. With these for light they set out doggedly down-stream in search of their lost hope.

Happily, since they were both fagged enough to drop in their tracks, the birch-bark was discovered stranded on their side of the river a hundred yards below the lower rapid. This time they ran no risks, and, though it cost them a half-hour of stumbling toil, they did not rest until they had carried the canoe around the rapid to place it high

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and dry in the little glade where they had made their camp.

The next morning found them plentifully stiff and sore from their strenuous exertions of the day before, but there was good cheer in the thought that thus far they had triumphed stoutly over difficulty and disaster.

"I feel as if I couldn't put one foot before the other, and I am sure you must be in the same condition," Prime groaned, over the second helping of fried potatoes and bacon, served in Domestic Science's best style. "Just the same, I mean to take a dose of the hair of the dog that bit me and go up after the remainder of our loot. While I am doing it you must stay here and watch the canoe, to see that it doesn't run away again. I wouldn't trust it a single minute, even on dry land."

"No," was the firm rejoinder. "You must get the sex idea out of your head once for all, Donald. It will be time enough for you to make it easy for me when I need it worse than I do now."

"Yesterday I said you were a wonder,

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Lucetta; to-day I rise to remark that you are two wonders, and mighty plucky ones at that."

"And to-morrow I shall be three wonders, and the next day four, and so on to infinity, I suppose," she said, laughing. "By the way, speaking of days, what day is this?"

Prime drew a notched twig from his pocket.

"Don't ever say after this that I am not the original Robinson Crusoe," he grinned. "I cut this twig the second day, just before we began the hike for the river." Then he counted up: "According to my almanac, this ought to be Monday—wash-day."

"Then yesterday was Sunday, which is why we had all our bad luck. We ought to have gone to church. Is it possible that we were both in Quebec no longer ago than last Tuesday night? It seems as if months had elapsed since then—months, I said, but I ought to have said ages."

"Are things changing for you so radically, then?" he asked.

"They are, indeed. And for you?"

"Yes; I guess so. For one thing, I have

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discovered the habitat of about a million muscles that I didn't know I had; and for another——”

“Well?” she challenged, “why don't you say it?”

“I will say it. For another, I have discovered the most remarkable woman that ever lived.”

She laughed joyously. “See what a few days of unavoidable propinquity will do! But you are mistaken—I'm not especially remarkable. You are only doing what Mr. Grider said you ought to do—studying the female of the species at short range.”

“Grider was an ass!” was the impatient rejoinder. “If I had him here I'd duck him in the river in spite of his fifty pounds excess. But this isn't getting the remainder of the dunnage. Are you quite sure you want to go along?”

“Quite sure,” she returned, and once more they took the riverside trail to the stream-head.

The third carry was lighter than the others had been, and the six-mile tramp was the best possible antidote for stiffened joints

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and lamed muscles. By the time they had reassembled themselves and their belongings in the little glade between the rapids they were both in fine fettle, and ready to begin the real journey.

The loading of the canoe was a new thing, but in this they gave common sense a free rein. The camp stuff and provisions were made into packages with the blankets and the tent canvas for wrappings; and each package was securely lashed beneath the brace-bars of the birch-bark, so that in case of a capsiz^e there would still be some chance for salvage. Prime's final precaution was worthy of a real woodsman. Drying the empty whiskey-bottle carefully with a wisp of grass, he filled it with matches, corked it tightly, and skewered it in an inside pocket of his coat.

"You are learning," Lucetta observed; and then: "Did you get that out of a story?"

"No, indeed; I dug it up whole out of my literary imagination. If I should tumble overboard you want to be sure to save the pieces, if you ever hope to see a fire again. Are we all ready?"

Five minutes later they had taken their

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lives in their hands and were shooting the rapids. With the laden canoe the paddling was an entirely different proposition. Mile after mile the quick water held, with only the shortest of reaches between Scylla and Charybdis for the breath-catching. At first the keen strain of it keyed nerve and muscle to the snapping-point; but after a time the fine wine of peril had its due and exhilarating effect, and they shouted and laughed, calling to each other above the turmoil of the waters, gasping joyously when the spray from the white-fanged boulders slapped them in the face, and having the luck of the innocent or the drunken, since disaster held aloof and they escaped with nothing more serious than the spray wettings.

Though light-heartedness thus sat in the saddle—or knelt on the paddling-mat—prudence was not wholly banished. At noon, when they pulled out at the foot of a quiet reach to make a pot of tea, they found that they were at the head of a rapid too swift and tortuous to offer anything but certain catastrophe. While the tea water was heating Prime went ahead to reconnoitre.

“Too many chances,” he reported on his

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return. "And, besides, the carry is only a few hundred yards. It means more hard work, but we can't afford to run the risk."

"Oh, dear me!" sighed the young woman in mock despair; "have we got to unload that canoe piece by piece, and then carry and load it all over again?"

"We shall doubtless have to do it so many times that we shall count that day lost when we are denied the opportunity," Prime laughed. "But, Heaven helping us, we shall make no more three-mile portages, as we did yesterday."

The task did not seem quite so formidable after they had broken their fast. Moreover, in the repeated packings and unpackings, they were gaining facility. With the dunnage transported they were ready to attack the birch-bark, and Lucetta had an inspiration.

"Haven't I seen a picture somewhere of the old *voyageurs* carrying their canoes on their heads?" she asked.

"Why, of course!" said Prime. "Why didn't we think of that last night? I believe I could carry it that way alone. Now, then,

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over she goes and up she goes; you set the pace, and for pity's sake don't stumble."

Nobody stumbled, and in due time the canoe was launched below the rapids, was reloaded, and the paddling was resumed. This day, which ended in a snug camp at the foot of a stretch of slow water which had kept them paddling all the afternoon, was a fair sample of their days through the remainder of the week. Night after night, after they had been shooting rapids, or making long carries, or paddling steadily through stretches where the current did not go fast enough for them, Prime found Lucetta's prophecy as to his growth coming true. Day by day he was finding himself anew, advancing by leaps and bounds, as it seemed, into a stronger and fresher and simpler manhood.

And as for the young woman—there were times when the realization that in a few hours of a single mysterious night she had passed from the world of the commonplace into a world hitherto unpictured even in her wildest imaginings, was graspable, but these moments were rare. Adaptable, even under the fetterings of the conventions, Lucetta

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Millington was finding herself fairly gifted now that the fetterings were removed. From childhood she had longed for an opportunity to explore the undiscovered regions of her own individuality, and now the opportunity had come. It pleased her prodigiously to find that Prime seemed not to be even remotely touched by their unchaperoned condition. From the first he had been merely the loyal comrade, and she tried consistently to meet him always upon his own ground—tried and succeeded.

On the Saturday night they found themselves at the head of a long portage, still in the heart of the wilderness, and having yet to see the first sign of any human predecessor along the pathway traced through the great forest by their little river.

“I can’t understand it,” Prime said that night over the camp-fire. “We have covered a good many miles since last Monday, and still we don’t seem to be getting anywhere. Another thing I don’t fancy is the way the river has changed its course. Have you noticed that for the last three days it has been flowing mainly northward?”

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The young woman became interested at once: "I hadn't noticed it," she admitted, and then: "Why don't you like it?"

"Because it seems a bit ominous. It may mean that we were carted clear over to the northern side of the big watershed, though that doesn't seem possible. If we were, we are going painstakingly away from civilization instead of toward it. That would account at once for the fact that we haven't come across any timber-cuttings. The northern rivers all flow into Hudson Bay."

Lucetta's gaze became abstracted. "Besides that, we are still groping in the blind alleys of the mysteries," she put in. "Have you given up the Mr. Grider idea?"

"I can't give it up wholly and save my sanity," Prime averred. "Think a minute; if we throw that away, what have we to fall back upon? Nothing, absolutely nothing! Nature abhors a vacuum, and so does the sane mind. Don't mistake me; I haven't the slightest idea that Grider let us in for any such experience as this, meaning to. But he took a chance, as every practical joker does, and the result in our case has

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spelled disaster. I am only hoping that it has spelled disaster for him, too, confound him!"

She smiled sweetly.

"Are you calling it disaster now? Only yesterday you said you were enjoying it. Have you changed your mind?"

"I have, and I haven't. From a purely selfish point of view, I'm having the finest kind of a vacation, and enjoying every blessed minute of it. More than that, the raggeder I grow the better I feel. It's perfectly barbarous, I know; but it is the truth. My compunctions are all vicarious. I shouldn't have had half so much fun if I had gone motoring through New England."

The young woman smiled again. "You needn't waste any of the vicarious compunctions on me. Honestly, Donald, I—I'm having the time of my life. It is the call of the wild, I suppose. I shall go back home, if I ever reach home, a perfect savage, no doubt, but the life of the humdrum will never be able to lay hold of me again, in the sense that it will possess me, as it used to."

Prime's grin was an expression of the purely primitive.

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"It is a reversion to type," he asserted, getting up to arrange Lucetta's sleeping-tent. "It makes one wonder if all humanity isn't built that way; if it wouldn't go back at a gallop if it were given half a chance."

"I don't call it going back," was the quiet reply. "I feel as if I had merely dropped a large number of utterly useless hamperings. Life has never seemed so free and completely desirable before, and yet, when we have been running some of the most terrifying rapids, I have felt that I could give it up without a murmur if I shouldn't prove big enough to keep it in spite of the hazards. At such times I have felt that I could go out with only one big regret—the thought that I wasn't going to live long enough to find out *why* I had to be drowned in the heart of a Canadian forest."

VIII

CRACKING VENEERS

At the foot of the long portage which had closed the week before them the two voyagers found the course of their river changing again to the southeastward, and were encouraged accordingly. In addition to the changing course the stream was taking on greater volume, and, while the rapids were not so numerous, they were more dangerous, or at least they looked so.

By this time they were acquiring considerable skill with the paddles, together with a fine, woodcrafty indifference to the hardships. In the quick water they were never dry, and they came presently to disregard the wettings, or rather to take them as a part of the day's work. As the comradeship ripened, their attitude toward each other grew more and more intolerant of the civilized reservations.

Over the night fires their talk dug deeply into the abstractions, losing artificiality in

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just proportion to the cracking and peeling of the veneers.

"I am beginning to feel as though I had never touched the real realities before," was the way Prime expressed it at the close of a day in which they had run a fresh gamut of all the perils. "Life, the life that the vast majority of people thrive upon, will always seem ridiculously trivial and commonplace to me after this. I never understood before that civilization is chiefly an overlaying of extraneous things, and that, given a chance, it would disintegrate and fall away from us even as our civilized clothes are doing right now."

The young woman looked up with a quaint little grimace. She was trying to patch the frayed hem of her skirt, sewing with a thread drawn from one of the blankets and a clumsy needle Prime had fashioned for her out of a fish-bone.

"Please don't mention clothes," she begged. "If we had more of the deerskin I'd become a squaw at once. The fringes wouldn't look so bad if they were done in leather."

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"Mere accessories," Prime declared, meaning the clothes. "Civilization prescribes them, their cut, fashion, and material. The buckskin Indians have the best of us in this, as in many other things."

"The realities?" she queried.

"The simplicities," he qualified. "Life as we have lived it, and as we shall probably live it again if we ever get out of this, is much too complex. We are learning how few the real necessities are, and it is good for the soul. I wouldn't take a fortune for what I've been learning in these weeks, Lucetta."

"I have been learning, too," she admitted.

"Other things besides the use of a paddle and a camp-fire?"

"Many other things. I have forgotten the world I knew best, and it is going to require a tremendous effort to remember it again when the need arises."

"I shall never get back to where I was before," Prime asserted with cheerful dogmatism. Then, in a fresh burst of confidence: "Lucetta, I'm coming to suspect that I have always been the merest surface-skimmer. I thought I knew life a little, and

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was even brash enough to attempt to write about it. I thought I could visualize humanity and its possibilities, but what I saw was only the outer skin—of people and of things. But my greatest impertinence has been in my handling of women."

"Injustice?" she inquired.

"Not intentional; just crass ignorance. I know now that I was merely imitative, choosing for models the character-drawings of men who knew even less about women than I did. Vapid sentimentality was about as far as I could get. It revolts me to think of it now."

Her laugh was as unrestrained as that of a child. "You amuse me, Donald. Most women are hopelessly sentimental. Don't you know that?"

"You are not," he retorted soberly.

"How do you know?"

"Heavens and earth! if I haven't had an opportunity to find out——"

"You haven't," she returned quietly; "not the least little morsel of an opportunity. A few days ago we were thrown together—a man and a woman who were total strangers,

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to live or die as the chance might fall. I defy any one to be sentimental in such circumstances. Sentiment thrives only in the artificialities; they are the very breath of its life. If men and women could know each other as they really are, there would be fewer marriages, by far."

"And the few would be far happier," Prime put in.

"Do you think so? I doubt it very much."

"Why?"

"Because, in the most admirable marriage there must be some preservation of the reticences. It is possible for people to know each other too well."

"I don't think so, if the qualities are of the kind that will stand the test."

"Who has such qualities?" she asked quickly.

"You have, for one. I didn't believe there was a human woman on earth who could go through what you have and still keep sweet. Setting aside the hardships, I fancy most other women would have gone stark, staring mad puzzling over the mystery."

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"Ah, yes; the mystery. Shall we ever be able to explain it?"

"Not if we decide to throw Grider overboard, I'm afraid."

"Doesn't the Mr. Grider solution seem less and less possible to you as time goes on?" she asked. "It does to me. The motive—a mere practical joke—isn't strong enough. Whoever abducted us was trying for something larger than a laugh at our expense."

"You'd think so, wouldn't you? Big risks were incurred, and the expense must have been considerable, too. Still, as I have said before, if we leave Grider out of it we abandon the one only remotely tenable explanation. I grant you that the joke motive is weak, but aside from that there is no motive at all. Nobody in this world could have any possible object in getting rid of me, and I am sure that the assumption applies with equal force to you. You see where it leaves us."

"I know," was the ready rejoinder. "If the mystery had stopped with our discovery of the aeroplane-tracks, it would have been

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different. But it didn't stop there. It continued with our finding of the ownerless canoe stocked for a long journey. Was the canoe left for us to find?"

Prime knew his companion well enough by this time to be willing to trust her with the grawsome truth.

"I don't know what connection the canoe may have had with our kidnapping, if any, but I am going to tell you something that I didn't care to tell you until we were far enough away from the scene of it. We reasoned that there were two owners for the canoe, arguing from the two rifles and the two hunting-knives. Do you know why they didn't turn up while we were waiting for them?"

"No."

"It was because they couldn't. They were dead."

"You knew it at the time?" she asked.

"Yes. I found them. It was in a little glade just below our camp at the river-head. They had fought a duel with knives. It was horrible, and I thought it best not to tell you—it seemed only the decent thing not to tell you."

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"When did you find them?"

"It was when I went over to the river on the excuse of trying to get some berries while you were cooking supper. I had seen the canoe when I went after the can of water. Instead of looking for berries I began to hunt around for the owners, thinking that probably they were camped somewhere near by. I didn't find any traces of a camp; but in the glade there were the ashes of five fires arranged in the shape of a Greek cross: one fire in the middle and one at the end of each arm. This mystified me still more, but it was then growing so dark that it was no use to look farther. Just as I was leaving the glade I stumbled over the two men, locked in each other's arms; they had evidently been dead for some hours, or maybe days."

"How perfectly frightful!" she exclaimed. "I don't wonder that you looked ill when you came back."

"It nearly knocked me out," Prime confessed. "But I realized at once that it wasn't necessary to multiply the shock by two. After you were asleep that night I went over and buried the two men—weighted them

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with stones and sunk them in the river, since I didn't have anything to dig with. Afterward, while I was searching for the other knife, I found a little buckskin bag filled with English sovereigns, lying, as I supposed, where one of them had dropped it. It seemed to indicate the motive for the desperate fight."

"But it adds just that much more to the mystery," was the young woman's comment.
"Were they white men?"

"Half-breeds or Indians, I couldn't tell which."

"Somebody hired them to do something with us?" she suggested tentatively.

"That is only a guess. I have made it half a dozen times only to have it pushed aside by the incredibilities. If we are to connect these two men with our kidnapping, it presupposes an arrangement made far in advance. That in itself is incredible."

"What do you make of the five fires?"

"I could make nothing of them unless they were intended for signal-fires of some kind; but even in that case the arrangement in the form of a cross wouldn't mean anything."

Cracking Veneers

The young woman had finished her mending and was putting the fish-bone needle carefully away against a time of future need.

"The arrangement might mean something if one were looking down upon it from above," she put in quietly.

Prime got up to kick the burned log-ends into the heart of the fire.

"If I didn't have such a well-trained imagination, I might have thought of that," he said, with a short laugh. "It was a signal, and it was lighted for the benefit of our aeroplane. How much farther does that get us?"

The young woman was letting down the flaps of her sleeping-tent, and her answer was entirely irrelevant.

"I am glad the protective instinct was sufficiently alive to keep you from telling me at the time," she said, with a little shudder which she did not try to conceal. "You may not believe it, Donald Prime, but I still have a few of the civilized weaknesses. Good night; and don't sit up too long with that horrid tobacco."

IX

SHIPWRECK

THOUGH the castaways had not especially intended to observe the day of rest, they did so, the Sunday dawning wet and stormy, with lowering clouds and foggy intervals between the showers to make navigation extrahazardous. When the rain settled into a steady downpour they pulled the canoe out of water, turning it bottom-side up to serve as a roof to shelter them. In the afternoon Prime took one of the guns and went afield, in the hope of finding fresh meat of some sort, though it was out of season and he was more than dubious as to his skill as either a hunter or a marksman. But the smoked meats were becoming terribly monotonous, and they had not yet had the courage to try the pemmican. Quite naturally, nothing came of the hunting expedition save a thorough and prolonged soaking of the hunter.

Shipwreck

"The wild things have more sense than I have," he announced on his return. "They know enough to stay in out of the rain. Can you stand the cold-storage stuff a little while longer?"

Lucetta said she could, and specialized the Sunday-evening meal by concocting an appetizing pan-stew of smoked venison and potatoes to vary the deadly monotonies.

The Monday morning brought a return of the fine weather. The storm had blown itself out during the night and the skies were clearing. The day of rain had swollen the river quite perceptibly, and a short distance below their Sunday camp its volume was further augmented by the inflow of another river from the east, which fairly doubled its size.

On this day there were fewer water hazards, and the current of the enlarged river was so swift that they had little to do save to keep steerageway on the birch-bark. Nevertheless, it was not all plain sailing. By the middle of the forenoon the course of the stream had changed again to the northward, swinging around through a wide

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half-circle to the west, and this course, with its Hudson Bay threatenings, was maintained throughout the remainder of the day.

Their night camp was made at the head of a series of rapids, the first of which, from the increased volume of the water, looked more perilous than any they had yet attempted. It was late when they made camp and, the darkness coming on quickly, they were prevented from reconnoitring. But they had the thunder of the flood for music at their evening meal, and it was ominous.

"I am afraid that noise is telling us that we are to have no thoroughfare to-morrow," was the young woman's comment upon the thunder music. "Let us hope it will be a short carry this time."

Prime laughed. "Isn't there a passage somewhere in the Bible about the back being fitted to its burden?" he asked. Then he went on for her encouragement: "It's all in the day's work, Lucetta-woman, and it is doing you no end of good. The next time you are able to look into a mirror you won't know yourself."

Though she had thought that she was

Shipwreck

by this time far beyond it, the young woman blushed a little under the rich outdoor brown.

"Then I'm not growing haggard and old?" she inquired.

"Indeed, you are not!" he asserted loyally. "I'm the beauty of the two"—passing a hand over the three weeks' growth of stubble beard on his face. "You are putting on weight every day. In another week your face will be as round as a full moon. It may not sound like it, but that was meant for a compliment."

"Was I too thin?" she wanted to know.

"Er—not precisely thin, perhaps; but a little strenuous. You gave me the idea at first that Domestic Science, with gymnasium teaching on the side, had been a trifle too much for you. Had they?"

"No; I was perfectly fit. But one acquires the habit of living tensely in that other world that we have lost and can't find again. It is human to wish to make money, and then a little more money."

"What special use have you for a little more money?" Prime asked curiously.

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"Travel," she said succinctly. "I should like to see the world; all of it."

"That wouldn't take so very much money. Goodness knows, the pen isn't much of a mining-pick, but with it I have contrived to dig out a year in Europe."

"You couldn't have done it teaching the daughters of retired farmers how to cook rationally," she averred. "Besides, my earning year is only nine months long."

"Then you really do want money?"

"Yes; not much money, but just enough. That is, if there is any such half-way stopping-point for the avaricious."

"There is," he asserted. "I have found it for myself. I should like to have money enough to enable me to write a book in the way a book ought to be written—in perfect leisure and without a single distracting thought of the royalty check. No man can do his best with one eye fixed firmly upon the treasurer's office."

"I had never thought of that," she mused. "I always supposed a writer worked under inspiration."

"So he does, the inspiration of the butcher

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and the baker and the anxious landlord. I can earn a living; I have done it for a number of years; but it is only a living for one, and there isn't anything to put aside against the writing of the leisurely book—or other things."

"Oh! then you have other ambitions, too."

"The one ambition that every normal-minded man ought to have: I want a wife and babies and a home."

"Then you certainly need money," she laughed.

"Sure I do; but not too much—always remember that—not too much."

"What would you call 'too much'?"

"Enough to spoil the children and to make it unnecessary for me ever to write another line."

This time her laugh was mocking. "Just now you said you wanted enough so that you could write without thinking of money," she reminded him.

"Oh, there is a golden mean; it doesn't have to be all honey or all vinegar. A nice tidy little income that would provide at a

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pinch for the butcher and the baker and the other people. You know what I mean."

"Yes, I think I do; and my ambition is hardly more soaring than yours. As you remarked, it doesn't cost so frightfully much to travel and live abroad."

He looked at her dubiously. "You don't mean that you'd wish to travel all the time, do you?"

"Why not?"

"Why—er—I don't know precisely. But you'd want to settle down and have a home some time, wouldn't you?"

"And cook for a man?" she put in. "Perhaps I haven't found the man."

Prime's laugh was boyishly blatant.

"I notice you are cooking pretty assiduously for a man these days. But perhaps that is only in self-defense. If the man cooked for you you wouldn't live very long."

"I am merely doing my bit, as the English say," was the cool retort. "I haven't said that I like to do it."

"But you do like to do it," he insisted. "If you didn't, you couldn't hit it off so cheerfully. I know a thing or two, and what

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I don't know I am learning. You are a perfectly normal woman, Lucetta, and normality doesn't mean continuous travel."

"You have changed your mind again. Last week you were calling me abnormal, and saying that you had never met a woman like me before."

"I hadn't; but that was my misfortune. I hope there are a good many like you; I've got to hope it for the sake of humanity and the good of the race. But this talk isn't getting us anywhere. We had better turn in; there is a hard day ahead of us tomorrow."

In the morning the prophecy seemed destined to fulfil itself in heaping measure. While Lucetta was getting breakfast Prime took to the woods and made a careful survey of some portion of the hazards ahead. He was gone for the better part of an hour, and when he came back his report was not encouraging.

"Worse and more of it," was the way he described the difficulties. "It is just one rapid after another, as far as I went; and that must have been a mile and a half or

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more. Coming back, I kept to the river bank, and tried to imagine us picking the way between the rocks in the channel. I believe we can do it if you have the nerve to try."

"If *I* have the nerve?" she flung back.
"Is that a revival of the sex idea?"

"I beg your pardon," he hastened to say.
"It was simply a manner of speaking. Your nerve is like the rest of you—superb. We'll shoot the rapids if it takes a leg. It would ask for more than a leg to make the carry."

A little later they loaded the canoe carefully for the greater hazard, packing the dunnage securely and protecting the meal and the flour as well as they could by wrapping them tightly in the canvas roll. Past this, they cut strips from the remaining scraps of deerskin and tied everything, even to the utensils, the guns, and the axe, to the braces, taking time to make their preparations thorough.

It was well that they took the time while they had it. After the birch-bark had been headed into the first of the rapids there was no time for anything but the strenuous fight

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for life. Faster and still faster the frail craft leaped on its way, down one rapid and into another before they could congratulate themselves upon the latest hairbreadth dodging of the thickly strewn boulders.

From time to time in the brief respites Prime shouted encouragement to his canoe-mate. "Keep it up—it can't last forever! We're doing nobly. Look out for this big beggar just ahead!"

So it went on, from bad to worse and then to bad again, but never with a chance for a landing or a moment's rest from the engrossing vigilance. Prime gasped and was thankful that there were days of sharp muscle-hardening behind them to fit them for this crowning test. He was sure he could measure Lucetta's fortitude by his own. So long as he could endure the strain he knew he could count upon hearing the steady dip of her paddle keeping time with his own.

But the worst of the worst was yet to come. At the foot of a series of rapids which were like a steeply descending stair, they found themselves in a sluiceway where the enlarged river ran like a torrent in flood.

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On the still air of the summer day a hoarse clamor was rising to warn them that there was a cataract ahead. Prime's cry of alarm was not needed. With the first backing dip of the paddle he felt the braking impulse at the stern striking in with his own.

"Hold her!" he shouted. "We've got to make the shore, if it smashes us!" But the puny strength of the two pairs of arms was as nothing when pitted against the onrush of the mighty flood. For a brief instant the downward rush of the canoe was checked; then it was caught in a whirling eddy and spun end for end as if upon a pivot. When it straightened up for the leap over the shallow fall it was headed the wrong way, and a moment later the crash came.

The young woman was the only one of the two who knew definitely what followed. In the tipping glide over the brink they were both thrown out of the canoe and spilled into the whirlpool at the foot of the cataract. Lucetta kept her head sufficiently to remember that Prime could not swim, and when she came up from the plunge she saw him, and saw that he was not struggling.



"Hold her!" he shouted. "We've got to make the shore, if it smashes us!"

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Two quick strokes enabled her to get her fingers in his hair, and then began a battle in which the strength of the single free arm had to match itself against the swirling current of the whirlpool. Twice, and yet once again, the young woman and her helpless burden were swept around the circle, each time drawing a little nearer to the recurring eddy under the fall. Lucetta knew well enough that a second engulfing under the cataract meant death for both, and at the beginning of the fourth circling she made the supreme effort, winning the desperate battle and struggling out upon the low shingly bank of the pool, to fall exhausted when she had dragged her unconscious canoe-mate out of the water.

After a dazed minute or two she was able to sit up and realize the extent of the disaster. The canoe had disappeared after its leap into the pool, and she did not know what had become of it. And Prime was lying just as the dragging rescue had left him, with his arms flung wide. His eyes were closed, and his face, under the three weeks' growth of stubble beard, was haggard and drawn.

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In the dive over the fall he had struck his head, and the blood was oozing slowly from a great bruise on his forehead.

X

HORRORS

It is a trite saying that even the weakest strand in the cable never knows how much it can pull until the demanding strain comes. As a young woman with athletic leanings, Lucetta had had arduous drillings in first-aid, and had drilled others. If Prime had been merely drowned she would have known precisely what to do. But the broken head was a different matter.

Nevertheless, when her own exhaustion was a little assuaged, she essayed the first-aid. Dragging the hapless one a little farther from the water's edge, she knelt beside him to examine the wound with fingers that trembled a little as they pressed, in spite of the brave diagnostic resolution. There was no skull fracture, but she had no means of determining how serious the concussion was. Prime was breathing heavily, and the bruise was already beginning to puff up and discolor.

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With hope still in abeyance, she worked swiftly. Warmth was the first necessity. Her hands were shaking when she felt in the pocket of Prime's coat for the precious bottle of matches. Happily it was unbroken, and she could have wept for joy. There was plenty of fuel at hand, and in a few minutes she had a fire blazing brightly, before which she propped the wounded man to dry out, though his wet clothing gave him a sweltering steam bath before the desiccating process began. It was heroic treatment, but there was no alternative, and by the time she had him measurably dried and warm, her own soggy discomfort was also abating.

Having done what she could, her situation was still as forlorn as it could well be; she was alone in the heart of the forest wilderness with a wounded man, who might live or die as the chance should befall—and there was no food. She set her face determinedly against the erosive impatience of despair. There was nothing to do but to wait with what fortitude she could muster.

The afternoon dragged on interminably, and to make the prospect more dispiriting

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the sky clouded over and the sun disappeared. Toward evening Prime began to stir restlessly and to mutter in a sort of feeble delirium. The young woman hailed this as a hopeful symptom, and yet the mutterings of the unconscious man were inexpressibly terrifying. What if the recovery should be only of the body and not of the mind?

As the dusk began to gather, Lucetta found her strong resolution ebbing in spite of all she could do. The thunder of the near-by cataract deafened her, and the darkling shadows of the forest were thickly shot with unnerving suggestions. To add the finishing touch, her mind constantly reverted to the story of the finding and disposal of the two dead men and she could not drive the thought away. In a short time it became a frenzied obsession, and she found herself staring wildly in a sort of hypnotic trance at the waterfall, fully expecting to see one or both of the dead bodies come catapulting over it.

While it was still light enough to enable her to distinguish things dimly, something did come over the fall, a shapeless object

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about the size of a human body, shooting clear of the curving water wall, to drop with a sullen splash into the whirlpool. Lucetta covered her eyes with her hands and shrieked. It was the final straw, and she made sure her sanity was going.

She was still gasping and trembling when she heard a voice, and venturing to look she saw that Prime was sitting up and holding his head in his hands. The revulsion from mad terror to returning sanity was so sudden and overpowering that she wanted to go to him and fall on her knees and hug him merely because he was a man and alive, and hadn't died to leave her alone with the frightful horrors.

"Didn't I—didn't I hear you scream?" he mumbled, twisting his tongue to the words with the utmost difficulty. And then: "What on earth has happened to me? I feel—as if—I had been run through—a threshing-machine."

"You were pitched out of the canoe and hurt," she told him. "I—I was afraid you were going to die!"

"Was that why you screamed?" The

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words were still foolishly hard to find and still harder to set in order.

At this she cried out again, and again covered her eyes. "No—no! It is there yet—in the whirlpool—one of the—one of the dead men!"

Though Prime was still scarcely more than half conscious of his condition and cripplings, the protective instinct was clamoring to be heard, dinging in his ears to make him realize that his companion was a woman, and that her miraculous courage had for some cause reached its ultimate limit. With a brand from the fire for a torch, he crept half mechanically on hands and knees to the edge of the bowl-like whirlpool. In due time he had a glimpse of a black object circling past in the froth and spume, and he threw the firebrand at it. A moment later he was setting the comforting prop of explanation under Lucetta's toppling courage.

"It is nothing but a log—just a broken log of wood," he assured her. "Forget it, and tell me more about how I came to get this bushel-basket head of mine. It aches like sin!"

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She described the plunge of the unmanageable canoe over the fall and its immediate consequences, minifying her own part in the rescue.

"You needn't try to wiggle out of it," he said soberly at the end of the brief recounting. "You saved my life. If you hadn't pulled me out, I'd be down there in that pool right now, going round and round like that bally log of wood. What do you charge for saving a man's life, Lucetta?"

"A promise from the man to be more careful in future. But we mustn't slide back into the artificial things, Donald. For all you know, my motive might have been altogether selfish—perhaps it was selfish. My first thought was a screaming horror of being left alone here in this wilderness. It made me fight, *fight!*"

"Is that the truth, Lucetta?" he inquired solemnly.

"Y-yes."

"All of the truth?"

"Oh, perhaps not quite all. There is such a thing as the life-saving instinct, isn't there? Even dogs have it sometimes. Of

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course I couldn't very well swim out and leave you to drown."

"No," he put in definitively, "you couldn't—and what's more, you hadn't the first idea of doing such a thing. And that other thing you told me was only to relieve my sense of obligation. You haven't relieved it—not an ounce. And I don't care to have it relieved. Let it go for the time being, and tell me what became of the canoe."

"I haven't the faintest notion. I didn't see it again after we went over the fall. Of course it is smashed and ruined and lost, and we are perfectly helpless again."

For a long minute Prime sat with his throbbing head in his hands, trying to think connectedly. When he looked up it was to say: "We are in a pretty bad box, Lucetta, with the canoe gone and nothing to eat. It is hammering itself into what is left of my brain that we can't afford to sit still and wait for something to turn up. If we push on down river we may find the canoe or the wreck of it, and there will surely be some little salvage. I don't believe the birch-bark would sink, even if it were full of water."

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"You are not able to push on," she interposed quickly. "As it is, you can hardly hold your head up."

"I can do whatever it is needful to do," he declared, unconsciously giving her a glimpse of the strong thread in the rather loosely woven fabric of his character. "I have always been able to do what I had to do. Let's start out at once."

With a couple of firebrands for torches they set out down the river bank, following the stream closely and keeping a sharp lookout for the wreck. Before they had gone very far, however, the blinding headache got in its work, and Prime began to stumble. It was at Lucetta's insistence that they made another halt and gave up the search for the night.

"It is no manner of use," she argued. "You are not able to go on; and, besides, we can't see well enough to make sure that we are not passing the thing we are looking for. We had much better stop right where we are and wait for daylight."

The halt was made in a small opening in the wood, and the young woman persuaded

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Prime to lie down while she gathered the material for another camp-fire. Almost as soon as it was kindled Prime dropped off into a heavy sleep. Lucetta provided fuel to last through the night, and then sat down with her back to a tree, determined to stay awake and watch with the sick man.

XI

"A CRACKLING OF THORNS"

THOUGH she had formed her resolution with a fair degree of self-reliance, Lucetta Millington soon found that she had set herself a task calling for plenty of fortitude and endurance. Beyond the circle of firelight the shadows of the forest gloomed forbiddingly. They had seen but little of the wild life of the woods in their voyagings thus far, but now it seemed to be stirring uneasily on all sides of the lonely camp-fire.

Once some large-hoofed animal went crashing through the underbrush toward the river; and again there were other hoof-beats stopping abruptly at a little distance from the clearing. Lucetta, shading her eyes from the glow of the fire, saw two gleaming disks of light shining in the blackness of the backgrounding forest. Her reason told her that they were the eyes of the animal; that the unnerving apparition was probably a deer halted and momentarily fascinated by the sight of

“A Crackling of Thorns”

the fire. But the incident was none the less alarming to the town-bred young woman.

Later there were softly padding footfalls, and these gave her a sharper shock. She knew next to nothing about the fauna of the northern woods, nor did she have the comforting knowledge that the largest of the American cats, the panther, rarely attacks a human being unless wounded, or under the crudest stress of winter hunger. Breathlessly she listened and watched, and presently she saw the eyes of the padding intruder glowing like balls of lambent green fire. Whereupon it was all she could do to keep from shrieking frantically and waking her companion.

After the terrifying green eyes had vanished it occurred to her to wonder why they had seen and heard so little of the night prowlers at their former camps. The reason was not far to seek. Days well filled with toil and stirring excitement had been followed by nights when sleep came quickly and was too sound to be disturbed by anything short of a cataclysm.

As midnight drew near, Prime began to

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mutter disconnectedly. Lucetta did not know whether he was talking in his sleep or whether he had become delirious again, but at all events this new development immeasurably increased the uncanny weirdness of the night-watch. Though many of the vaporings were mere broken sentences without rhyme or reason, enough of them were sufficiently clear to shadow forth a sketchy story of Prime's life.

Lucetta listened because she could not well help it, being awake and alert and near at hand. Part of the time Prime babbled of his boyhood on the western New York farm, and she gathered that some of the bits were curious survivals of doubtless long-forgotten talks with his grandfather. Breaking abruptly with these earlier scenes, the wandering underthought would skip to the mystery, charging it now to Watson Grider and again calling it a blessed miracle. With another abrupt change the babbler would be in Europe, living over again his trampings in the Tyrol, which, it seemed, had been taken in the company of an older man, a German, who was a Heidelberg professor.

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Farther along, after an interval of silence in which Lucetta began to hope that the talkative fit had passed, Prime broke out again—this time waxing eloquent over his struggles in New York as a beginner in the writing trade. Here there were revelations to make her sorry that she was obliged to listen; for years, it seemed, the fight had gone discouragingly hard with him; there had been times when he had had to choose between giving up in defeat or going hungry.

Lucetta pieced together a pitiful little story of this starving time. Some one—once Prime called the some one Grider, and later gave him another name—had tempted the struggler with an offer of a comfortable income, the single condition precedent being an abandonment of the literary fight. Prime's mutterings made the outcome plain for the listener on the opposite side of the camp-fire: “No, I couldn't sell soap; it's honest enough, no doubt—and decent enough—everybody ought to use soap. But I've set my hand to the plough—no, that isn't it. . . . Oh, dammit, Peter, you know what I mean; I can't turn back; that is the one thing I've

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never learned how to do. No, and I can't take your money as a loan; that would be only another way of confessing defeat. No, by George, I won't go out to dinner with you, either!"

Lucetta wept a little in sheer sympathy. Her own experience had not been too easy. Left an orphan while she was still too young to teach, she knew what it meant to set the heart upon a definite end and to strive through thick and thin to reach it. She was relieved when Prime began to talk less coherently of other incidents in his life in the great metropolis. There were more references to Grider, and at last something that figured as Prime's part in a talk with the barbarian. "Yes, by Jove, Watson, the scoundrels tried to pull my leg; actually advertised for me in the *Herald*. No, of course, I didn't fall for it. I know perfectly well what it was . . . same old gag about the English estate with no resident heirs in sight. No, the ad. didn't say so, but I know. What's that?—I'm a liar? Like Zeke I am!"

There were more of the vaporings, but neither these nor the young woman's anxiety

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about the wounded man's condition were disturbing enough at the last to keep her eyelids from drooping and her senses from fluttering over the brink of the sleep abyss. Once she bestirred herself to put more fuel on the fire, but after that the breeze blew the mosquitoes away, the warmth from the upleaping blaze added its touch, and she fell asleep.

When she awoke the sun had risen and Prime was up and mending the fire.

“Better,” he said cheerfully, in answer to her instant question. “Much better; though my head reminds me of the day when I got the check for my first story—pretty badly swelled, you know. But after I've had a good cup of hot tea”—he stopped in mid-career with a wry laugh. “Bless my fool heart! If I hadn't totally forgotten that we haven't any tea or anything else! And here I've been up a quarter of an hour and more, trying to get a good cooking-fire started! Where were we when we left off last night?”

“We had set out to search for the wreck of the canoe,” she explained, rising to stand

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before the fire. "We came this far, and concluded it was no use trying to go on in the dark. You were pretty badly off, too."

"It's coming back to me, a little at a time and often, as the cat remarked when it ate the grindstone," he went on, determined to make her smile if it were within the bounds of possibility. He knew she must have had a bad night of it, and the brightness of the gray eyes told him that even now she was not very far from tears. "Don't cry," he added abruptly; "it's all over now."

Her laugh was the sort that harbors next door to pathos.

"I'm hungry!" she said plaintively. "We had no dinner yesterday, and no supper last night, and there doesn't seem to be any very brilliant prospect for breakfast this morning."

Prime put his hand to his bruised head as if to satisfy himself that it was all there.

"Haven't you ever gone without a meal before for the raw reason that you couldn't get it?" he asked.

"Not since I can remember."

"I have; and it's bad medicine—mighty

"A Crackling of Thorns"

bad medicine. We'll put the fire out and move on. While there's life there's hope; and our hope this morning is that we are going to find the wreck of that canoe. Let's hike."

They set out courageously, keeping close to the bank of the river and scanning every eddy and backwater as they moved along. For this cause their progress was slow, and it was nearly or quite noon when they came to a quiet reach in the river, a placid pond with great trees overhanging its margins and wide stretches of reeds and bulrushes growing in the shallows. And on the opposite side of the pond-like expanse and apparently grounded among the bulrushes they saw their canoe. It was bottom side up with care, and on the wrong side of the river; also they knew that its lading, if any of this had survived the runaway flight, must be soaked and sodden. But the triumphant fact remained—the canoe was found.

XII

IN SEARCH OF AN ANCESTOR

FOR a moment neither of them spoke. Then Prime broke out in a sardonic laugh.

"That is a heavenly prospect for dinner, supper, breakfast, and dinner all rolled into one, isn't it, now? If there is anything left in the canoe, it's soaked to a pulp—to say nothing of the fact that we can't get to it. How are we going to raft ourselves over there without the axe?"

Lucetta went down to the margin of the pond-like reach and tested its depth with a tossed stone.

"It is deep," she said, "swimming-deep. The shallows must be all on the other side."

"I'll go down-stream a piece and see if there isn't some place where I can wade," Prime offered. But at this she shook her head.

"We passed out of all the wading depths days and days ago. If you will make a fire, I'll swim over and get the canoe."

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Prime had a world of objections to offer to this, and he flung them into the breach one after another. It was no woman's job. The water was cold, and it would be a long swim—for a guess, not less than a hundred yards; she had gone without food so long that she was not fit for it; if she should try it and fail, he would have to go in after her, and that would mean suicide for both of them.

She heard him through with a quaint little lip-curl of amusement at his fertility in obstacle raising, and at the end calmly fished the remains of his handkerchief out of his pocket and bound it about her head.

"Another attack of the undying protective instinct," she retorted light-heartedly. "You go on and make the fire and I'll save the wreck, or what there is left of it." Whereupon she walked away up-stream, losing herself shortly for Prime in a thicket beyond the first bend of the river above.

Prime fell to work gathering fuel, feeling less like a man than at any time since the voyage had begun. It stabbed his *amour-propre* to the heart to be compelled to let

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her take the man's part while he did the squaw's. But there seemed to be no help for it.

While he was kindling the fire he heard a plunge, and a little later saw the coifed head making diagonally across from the upper bend toward the canoe. She was swimming easily with the side stroke, and he could see the rhythmical flash and swing of a white arm as she made the overhand reach. Then he dutifully turned his back and gave his entire attention to the fire-making.

When he looked again she had righted the canoe and was coming across with it, swimming and pushing it ahead of her. At a little distance from the shore she called to him: "Take it; it's all yours"—giving the birch-bark a final shove. "I'll be with you in a few minutes." And with that she turned off and swam away up-stream to her dressing-thicket.

Prime gave her time to disappear and then went to draw the canoe out on the bank and to begin an inventory of the losses. Thanks to the care they had taken in tying

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everything in, nothing was missing save the paddles. Such food as was still in the original tin was undamaged, but the meat was soaked and the flour and meal were soggy masses of paste. Prime was dismayed. The small stock of potatoes would not last forever, and neither would the canned vegetables. They were not yet backwoodsmen enough to live upon meat alone; and another and crowning misfortune was the loss of the salt.

Prime was lamenting over the wet salt-sack and trying to save some little portion of the precious condiment when Lucetta came on the scene, looking as bright and fresh as the proverbial field-flower after her plunge and swim, and took over the culinary problem. Fortunately, they still had the salt pork, and the pretty *cuisinière* issued her orders promptly.

"Find some nice clean pieces of birch bark and spread this flour and meal out so that it will dry before the fire," she directed; and while he was doing that and hanging the blankets and tent canvas up to drip and dry, she opened a tin of baked beans and made another of the triumphant stews of

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jerked deer meat and potatoes seasoned with a bit of the salt pork. Upon these two dishes they presently feasted royally, making up for the three lost meals, and missing the bread only because they didn't have it.

"I have settled one thing in my own mind," Prime declared, while he was assiduously drying a leaf of the soaked tobacco for the after-dinner smoke. "If I am ever cast away again, I'm going to make dead sure that I have a Domestic Science expert for a fellow sufferer. Lucetta, you are simply great when it comes to making something out of nothing. What are we going to do with this flour-and-meal pudding?"

"We are going to dry it carefully and then grind it up again on a flat stone and go on as before," was the cheerful reply. "That is my part of it, and yours will be a good bit harder; you will have to make some new paddles and contrive some way to patch that big hole in the canoe."

Prime laughed hilariously. His head was still aching, but the disaster had fallen so far short of the ultimate fatalities that the small discomforts were as nothing.

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"I can imagine both the paddles and the patch," he boasted. "It remains to be seen whether or not I can turn them into serviceable realities."

While the dunnage was drying and Lucetta was regrinding her flour and meal Indian-fashion on a smooth stone, Prime hacked manfully at a small spruce and finally got it down. It took him the better part of the afternoon to split the tree with wooden wedges and to get out two pieces to be hewn roughly with the axe into the paddle shape. Over the evening fire he whittled laboriously with the sharper of the two hunting-knives, and when the knife grew dull he learned by patient trial to whet it on a bit of stone. To keep him company, Lucetta had recourse to the fish-bone needle. Her clothes had not come scathless out of the cataract disaster and its aftermath.

"You have one of the best of the good qualities, Donald," she said, marking the patience with which the whittling went on. "You are not afraid to buckle down to the necessity and keep on trying."

"Patient continuance in well-doing," he

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quoted, grinning. "I learned that, up one side and down the other, in the writing trade. It is about the only thing that gets you anywhere."

"You had a hard time making your start in the writing, didn't you?" she offered.

"When did I ever tell you that?"

"You told me something about it the first day we were together, and a good bit more last night."

"Huh! Talking in my sleep, was I? What did I say?"

"A lot of things; I can't remember them all. You talked about Mr. Grider, and the mystery, and the dead men, and I don't know what all."

"I didn't say anything about the girl, did I?"

"Not a word," she returned.

"For the best possible reason on earth, Lucetta: there hasn't been any girl. You don't believe that, I suppose. You wouldn't believe it of any man of my age, and—and temperament?"

"Yet you said night before last that you wanted a wife and children and a home. Doesn't that presuppose a girl?"

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"In my case it presupposes a handsomely imaginary girl; I'm great on the imaginary things."

"What does she look like—this imaginary girl of yours?"

He glanced up from the paddle-whittling. "Some day, when we get back into the world again, I'll show you what she looks like. Can you wait until then?"

"You don't leave me any choice."

"We ran off the track," he went on, after a little interval of silence. "You were telling me what I talked about last night."

"Oh, yes; I have forgotten most of it, as I said; but along at the last there were a good many disjointed things about your fight for recognition. Once, I remember, you were talking to somebody about soap."

Prime's laugh was a guffaw.

"I can laugh at it now," he chuckled; "but it was mighty binding at the time—that soap incident. I was down in a hole, in the very bottom of the hole. I had written a book and couldn't get it published; couldn't get anybody to touch it with a ten-foot pole. I had friends who were willing to lend me

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money to go on with, and one who offered me a job writing advertisements for his soap factory. It was horribly tempting, but when I was built, the ability to let go, even of a failure, was left out. So I didn't become an ad. writer. What else did I say?"

"Oh, a lot of things that didn't make sense; one of them was about an advertisement you said you had seen in the *New York Herald*. I couldn't make out what it was; something about an English estate."

Prime looked up quickly.

"Isn't it odd how these perfectly inconsequent things bury themselves somewhere in the human brain, to rise up and sneak out some time when the bars happen to be left down," he speculated. "There was such an ad., and I saw it; but I don't believe I have given it a second thought from that time to this."

"When you spoke of it last night, you seemed to be telling Mr. Grider about it. Was it addressed to you?"

"It was addressed to the heirs of Roger Prime, of Batavia, and Roger Prime was my father. If I remember correctly, the

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advertisers gave a Canadian address—Ottawa, I think—and the ‘personal’ was worded in the usual fashion: ‘If the heirs of Roger Prime will apply’—and so on; you know how they go. It was the old leg-pull.”

“I don’t quite understand,” she demurred. “What do you mean by ‘leg-pull’?”

“The swindle is so venerable that it ought to have whiskers by this time. Every once in a while a rumor leaks out that some great estate has been left in England, or somewhere else across the water, with no native heirs. You or I, if we happen to have a family name that fits in, are invited to contribute to a sum which is being made up to pay the cost of establishing the rights of the American descendants, and there you are. I suppose hundreds of thousands of dollars have been buncoed out of credulous Americans in that way, first and last.”

“I wish you could remember the Canadian address which you say you think was Ottawa,” rejoined the young woman reflectively.

“Why?”

“Because I saw in a Cleveland newspaper

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an advertisement of the same nature, addressed to the heirs of the body of Clarissa Millington, born Bradford. Clarissa Millington was my mother. There was no name signed, but a business address was given, and it was in Ottawa."

"You have forgotten the address?" said Prime.

"I didn't try to remember it. I wrote it down, and I have it in my luggage in Quebec."

The paddle-maker looked up with an accusing laugh.

"You were planning to return from Quebec by way of Ottawa; you were going to give those sharks some of your hard-earned teaching money. Don't deny it."

"I can't," she confessed. "I meant to do that very thing. And I thought I had plenty of time. There was a date limit set in the advertisement, and it was July thirty-first. Do you think it was a swindle?"

"There isn't the least doubt of it. Your kidnapping has saved you some money. The date limit was merely to make you hustle. I have seen the game worked be-

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fore, and it is very plausible. And since it is usually worked from Canada, a citizen of the United States has no recourse in law. You had a narrow escape."

"We may call it that, anyway," was the young woman's reply. "The thirty-first of July will probably be nothing more than a memory by the time we find our way back to the world."

A busy silence followed the dismissal of the subject, and then Lucetta began to tell about the various alarms she had had during the previous night. "All of which goes to prove that I am still the normal woman," she concluded.

"You are a heroine, and one of these days I mean to put you in a book," Prime threatened. "You saved my life yesterday and my self-respect to-day; and that is more than a man ought to expect from the most normal woman in the world."

"Your self-respect?"

"Yes; you heard me babbling all night, and you have been good-hearted enough not to report anything that a man need be ashamed of."

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"You didn't say anything to be ashamed of," she returned quickly. "Most of the talk was about the old farm near Batavia; that and your grandfather."

"Grandfather Bankhead," he mused; "they don't make any finer characters nowadays than he was—or as fine."

"Bankhead?" she asked suddenly; "was that your grandfather's name?"

"It was: Abner Greenlow Bankhead. It is not such a very usual name. Have you ever heard it before?"

"Heard it? Why—why, it was my mother's mother's maiden name! She was a Bankhead, and she married Josiah Greenlow Bradford!"

Prime dropped both paddle and knife.

"Well—wouldn't that jar you!" he exclaimed. "Can it be possible that—hold on a minute; my grandfather had a Bankhead cousin who grew up in the family, and she married and moved to Ohio, away along back in the other century. What was your grandmother's Christian name?"

"It was an old-fashioned one—Lorinda. I can remember her indistinctly as a little

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old lady with white hair and the brightest possible blue eyes."

Prime was wagging his head as one in a daze. "It is too wonderful to be true, Lucetta! But it must be true. My grandfather's cousin's name was Lorinda, and I can remember seeing an oil portrait of her, a horrible thing done by some local artist, hanging in the old farmhouse at Batavia. I can't figure it out, but the way it is working around, we ought to be cousins of some sort. Can you believe it?"

The young woman put her mending aside to trace the relationship thoughtfully, counting the generations on her finger-tips. When she had finally determined to her own satisfaction that they really had a common ancestor four generations back, she laughed.

"It is wonderful," she said; "almost too wonderful to be true. But the wonder of it is completely overshadowed by the unbelievable coincidence which dropped us two, cousins and descendants of that far-away Bankhead, down together on the beach of a forest lake in the wilds of the Canadian backwoods—a lake that neither of us ever

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saw or heard of before. Will the mysteries never end?"

"Wait a minute; let's get it straight," Prime interposed. "We are really cousins, aren't we? Don't you figure it out that way?"

"Third cousins; yes."

"You'll have to show me," he invited. "Genealogy is like Sanskrit to me."

She proceeded to show him, and from that the talk drifted rather excitedly into family reminiscences. After the manner of people who really have ancestors, neither of them was able to remember many of the traditions. Prime's recollections, indeed, stopped short with his grandfather, but Lucetta knew a little more about the older generations, and she dug the individuals out one by one, offering them to Prime as spurs to further rememberings.

"No, I don't remember anything about Jabez," he said. "And Elvira and Elmina and John I never heard mentioned. Grandfather Bankhead had no near relations that I know of except his brother Jasper and his cousin Lorinda, who grew up with him."

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"I seem to remember something about grandmother's cousin Jasper," Lucetta put in. "Didn't something happen to him—something out of the usual?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply. "He disappeared—went to the Far West when he was a young man and was never heard of afterward. Grandfather often wondered what had become of him, and in his later years spoke of him quite frequently."

Lucetta went on with her mending, the fish-bone needle making her progress primitivesly slow. Prime got up and strolled down to the river-bank. When he returned he went around to her side of the fire to say:

"I'm mighty glad we have found out that we are cousins, Lucetta; twice glad, for your sake. It makes things a bit easier for you, doesn't it?"

She did not look up.

"Why should it?" she asked quietly.

"Oh, I don't know; we have both been throwing tin cans and brickbats at the conventions; but I haven't any idea that we have killed them off permanently. And they die harder in a woman than in a man."

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We have jollied things along pretty well, so far, but that isn't saying that I haven't known how hard it must have been for you. As matters stand now, I am your natural protector."

She looked up with the quaint little smile that he had learned to know, to interpret, and to love.

"What difference does the relationship make, Donald, so long as you are what you are? And what difference would it make if you happened to be the other kind of man?"

He stood smiling down upon her with his hands in his pockets.

"Your trust is the most wonderful thing in this world, Lucetta—and the most beautiful. I should have to be a much worse man than I have ever dared to be to do anything to spoil it," he said slowly, and with that he went to set up her sleeping-tent.

XIII

AT CAMP COUSIN

PRIME whittled through the better part of the succeeding forenoon on the paddles, and for the midday bread Lucetta tried her domestic-science hand upon the dried and reground flour. Not to draw too fine a comparison, the paddles were the better success, though the bread was eatable. In the afternoon the man of all work, with Lucetta for consulting engineer, tackled the broken canoe.

There was no lack of materials with which to make the repairs if they had only known how to use them. Attempts to sew a patch of birch bark over the hole with threads drawn from the blanket were dismal failures. At each of the thread punctures the patch would split and curl up most perversely; and when night came they had succeeded only in making a bad matter slightly worse.

After supper they put their heads together to become, if the oracles should prove aus-

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picious, inventors in this hitherto untried field.

"If we only had a few drops of Indian blood in us!" Prime complained. "What do you suppose they daub this bark thing with to make it water-tight? It must be something they find in the woods."

Lucetta went over to the canoe, chipped a bit of the daubing from one of the seams, and tasted it appraisingly.

"It tastes like spruce-gum," she offered; . "do you suppose it can be?"

Prime ate a little in his turn and confirmed the guess. "That is about what it is," he decided. "The next thing is to find out how they contrive to get enough of it. I wonder if they tap the trees as we do sugar-maples?"

"If we could find a tree that has been broken," Lucetta suggested. And then: "How have we managed to live so long without learning some of these perfectly simple things, Cousin Donald?"

"Too much education and too little instinct," he scoffed. "To-morrow morning I'll climb trees and become a gum-gatherer. It seems inexpressibly humbling to think

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that a small hole in a piece of birch bark is all that prevents us from going on our way rejoicing. Never mind, there is another day coming, and if there isn't, success or failure won't make any considerable difference to either of us."

Bright and early the next morning they tried the spruce-gum experiment. Prime found that he could have plenty of it for the gathering, and when they had a sufficient quantity they melted it in one of the empty vegetable tins and used it as a glue with which to make the patch adhere. The result was not entirely satisfactory. The melted gum hardened quickly, but it became so brittle that a touch would loosen it.

"This is where we set up a laboratory for original research," Lucetta said, laughing. "I wonder if some more cooking would do it any good."

"The ruling passion strong in death," Prime quoted with good-natured sarcasm. "You are a born cook. Let's try it."

They tried it and merely succeeded in making the product still more brittle. They then tried adding a little grease from the

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fat pork to make it more flexible, and that ruined it completely.

“Two civilized brains, college-trained to a piano-polish finish, and not a single workable idea between them,” Prime derided. “It’s humiliating—disgusting!”

“The brains are still available,” asserted the undaunted one. “Go and find some pine pitch and we’ll mix it with the spruce.”

This experiment promised better success. A gluey mixture resulted that stuck, not only to the canoe body and the patch, but to their fingers and to everything it touched. Inventing still further, they contrived a rude clamp to hold the patch in place while it was drying, if by good hap the glue would consent to dry at all; and with the new paddles whittled and scraped into shape, there was nothing to do but to wait upon the drying process.

Prime spent the afternoon fishing, with the tackle found in one of the gun-cases, and was lucky enough to accumulate a noble string of trout. Lucetta would not say what she was going to do, merely hinting that Prime’s absence until supper-time would be

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a boon. Only the buzzard swinging in slow circles overhead could have told tales of the doing after the young woman had obtained her meed of solitude in the little glade, and possibly the buzzard had seen a sufficient number of blanketed women washing clothes at a river brink not to be unduly stirred at the sight.

Later, Prime came in to exhibit his string of fish with true sportsman's pride, and again they feasted royally, forgetting their late tribulations, and looking forward half-regretfully to a resumption of their journey on the morrow.

"It is astonishing how rapidly one can revert to the cave-man type," was Prime's phrasing of the regret. "I have been a person of pavements and cement walks all my life, as I suppose you have—of the paved streets and all that they stand for. Yet I shall go back to them with something like reluctance. Shan't you?"

She did not reply to the direct question.

"You speak as if you had some assurance that we are approaching the pavements. Have you?"

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"A bare hint. I fished along the river for about a mile down-stream, spying out the land—or the water—as I went, for future reference. We can't claim this region by the right of discovery. Somebody has been here before us."

"You didn't find a house?" she ventured.

"Oh, no; nothing like that. But I did find the stump of a tree, and the tree had been felled with an axe. It wasn't recently; the stump was old and moss-grown. But it was axe work just the same."

She laughed softly.

"I don't know whether to be glad or sorry, Donald; for myself, I mean. Of course, you want to get back to your work."

"Do I?" he inquired. "I suppose I ought to want to. I left a book half finished in my New York attic."

"How could you do that? I should think such work would be ruined by having a vacation come along and cut it in two."

"I was sick of it," he confessed frankly. "It was another pen picture of the artificialities, and I shall never finish it now. I'll write a better one."

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“Staging it in a Canadian forest?”

“Staging it among the realities, at least. And there shall be a real woman this time.”

In his new character of cousin-in-authority, Prime sent Lucetta early to bed to catch up on her arrears of sleep. After she had disappeared behind the curtains of the small shelter-tent, he sat for a long time before the fire smoking the rank tobacco and letting his thoughts rove at will through the mazes of the strange adventure which had befallen him and this distant cousin, of whose very existence he had been ignorant.

More and more the mazes perplexed him, and the coincidences, if they were coincidences, began to verge upon the fantastic or the miraculous. Was it by accident or design that they had both chanced to be in Quebec at the same time? If the plot were of Grider's concocting, did the barbarian know of the cousinship beforehand? Prime was charitable enough to hope that he did. It made the brutal joke—if it were a joke—a little less criminal to suppose that Grider knew of the relationship.

Still, it was all vastly incredible on any

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joking hypothesis. Taking the most lenient view of it—that Grider had pre-arranged the assault upon their liberty and had hired the two half-breeds to pick them up and convoy them out of the wilderness—it was unbelievable that the barbarous one, with all of his known disregard for the common humanities where his Homeric sense of humor was involved, would have turned them over to the tender mercies of two semi-savages whose character had been sufficiently demonstrated by the manner of their death.

"It simply *can't* have been Watson Grider," Prime mused over his sixth cigarette—he was rolling them now in the label paper of the vegetable tins, frugally soaked off and saved. "If it had been his joke, he wouldn't have left it up in the air; he would have followed along to get the good of it. But if it isn't Grider, who is it, and what is it all about?"

The riddle always worked around thus to the same tormenting question, with no hint of an answer; and, as many times before, Prime was obliged to leave it hanging, like Mohammed's coffin, between heaven

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and earth. But when he renewed the fire and rolled himself in his blankets for the night, he was still casting about for some means of bringing it to earth.

Figuring it out afterward, he was certain that he could not have been asleep for more than an hour or two before he was awakened, with the echo of a noise like volley-firing of some sort still ringing in his ears. His first impulse was to spring up, but the second, which was the one he obeyed, was more in keeping with the new character development. Deftly freeing himself from the blanket wrappings, he reached over to make sure that one of the guns could be caught up quickly, and lay quiet.

For some little time nothing happened, and the night silence of the forest was undisturbed. Just as he was beginning to think that it had been the mosquitoes, and not a noise, which had awakened him, and was about to get up and renew the smudge which he had made to windward before turning in, he heard cautious footsteps as of some one approaching from the direction of the river.

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The measured tread assured him that the footfalls were human, and his hold tightened mechanically upon the grip of the gun-stock. By this time he was thinking quite clearly, and he told himself that the militant precaution was doubtless unnecessary; that there was little chance that the approaching intruder—any intruder who would be attracted by the light of the camp-fire—would be unfriendly. Yet it was the part of prudence to be prepared.

After a moment or two he was able to note that the approaching footsteps were growing more cautious. At this he rolled over by imperceptible inchings to face toward the river, drawing the gun with him. It was useless to try to penetrate the black shadows of the background. The fire had died down to a mass of glowing embers, its bedtime replenishing of dried wood blazing up fitfully only now and then to illumine a slightly wider circle. Prime saw nothing, and, for a time after the footfalls ceased, heard nothing. But the next manifestation was startling enough. At a moment when he was beginning to wonder if his imagination had been playing tricks on him, he heard

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a curious ripping sound coming, this time, from behind the inverted canoe.

Silently he rose to his knees with the rifle held low. For shelter, in case of a shower, the provisions had been placed under the inverted birch-bark, and he decided instantly that the intruder was trying to steal them. Not wishing to alarm Lucetta, he got upon his feet and walked toward the canoe, meaning to put the man behind it between himself and the firelight.

The manœuvre was never completed. Before he had taken half a dozen steps a blinding flashlight was turned upon him from behind the canoe, and it stopped him as suddenly as if the dazzling radiance had been a volley from a machine-gun. But the stopping shock was only momentary. Dashing forward around the end of the canoe, he had a glimpse of a big-bodied man in a golf cap and sweater crashing his way through the undergrowth toward the river, and promptly gave chase.

“Grider!—Watson!” he called, but there was no reply. The intruder, as he ran, had the benefit of his flashlight; Prime could see the momentary gleams as the runner

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took a diagonal course which would bring him out a hundred yards down-stream from a point directly opposite the camp-fire.

Prime collided with a tree, stumbled and fell, and sprang up to call again. The retreating footfalls were no longer audible, but now there was another cacophony of noise—the sputtering exhausts of a motor-boat—and Prime reached the river-bank in time to see the dark shape of the power-driven craft losing itself in the starlight in its swift rush down the river.

In the first flush of his rage at what figured as a second heartless desertion, Prime was strongly tempted to open fire on the retreating motor-boat and its occupant. This was purely a cave-man prompting, and before it could translate itself into action the opportunity was gone. When the motor-boat had disappeared, losing itself to sight and sound, the breathless pursuer went back to his blankets, swearing gloomily at the spiteful chance which had opened the door of misfortune by making him a college classmate of one Watson Grider.

XIV

OF THE NAME OF BANDISH

THE next morning Prime waited until after breakfast before telling Lucetta about the visit of the intruder, the postponement basing itself upon a very natural disinclination to re-align himself, even constructively, with such a brutal humorist as Watson Grider. Indeed, when he told the story, he omitted to mention the barbarian's name; would never have mentioned it if Lucetta had not pushed him into a corner.

"You say you saw the man; was it a stranger, or some one you knew?" she questioned.

"I couldn't be sure," Prime evaded. "The fire wasn't burning very brightly, and he had just blinded me with his flashlight."

The gray eyes were regarding him calmly.

"It is to be hoped, Cousin Donald, that you will never have to fib yourself out of a real difficulty. You prevaricate so clumsily, you know."

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"I wasn't lying," he protested; "really, you know, I couldn't be sure."

"But you thought you recognized him."

"Yes, I did," he admitted doggedly. "I didn't mean to tell you, but I fancy it doesn't make any great difference now. It was Grider, of course."

"You are sure?"

"I have just said that I wasn't sure. I didn't see his face. But I saw a golf cap and a sweater, and Grider wears both upon any and all occasions; he has even been accused of sleeping in them."

"But why should he come here like that and then run away again?"

"He wanted to find out how his execrable joke was getting along, of course! I had a mind to fire at him after he got into the boat, and I wish now that I had. You didn't hear any of the noise?"

"Not a sound." They had taken the cooking utensils down to the river edge to wash them, and Lucetta scoured for a silent half minute on the skillet before she picked the one comforting grain of assurance out of the midnight adventure. "We ought to

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be obliged to this outrageous friend of yours for one thing, anyway," she commented. "He has told us that there are no more rapids to be shot. If he could come up the river in a motor-boat, we can go down it safely in a canoe."

"That is so," said Prime; "I hadn't thought of that. I wonder if our patch is sticking all right. Suppose we go and see."

They went to look, and what they saw struck them both dumb. The clamped patch was still in place, but a glance at the upturned canoe bottom showed them what the midnight marauder had done and explained for Prime the cause of the ripping noise he had heard. For a distance fully one-third of its length the thin sheathing of the canoe had been cut as if with the slashing blow of a sharp knife.

Prime was the first to find speech, and what he said would have kindled a fire under wet wood. Then he remembered and made gritting amends. "I beg your pardon; I couldn't help it, Lucetta. I'm not taken that way very often, but I should have blown up like a rotten boiler if I couldn't have re-

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lieved the pressure. Did you ever hear of such an infernally idiotic scoundrel in all your life? I wish to gracious I'd had the courage of my convictions and turned loose on him with the gun! He deserves to be shot!"

Lucetta was examining the damaged canoe bottom more closely. "But why?" she protested. "Why should he follow us up so vindictively, Donald? Surely it has passed all the limits of any kind of a joke by this time."

"Of a joke?—yes; I should say so! I hate to think it of him, Lucetta—I do for a fact. If I hadn't seen him I wouldn't believe it was Watson; but seeing is believing."

"Not always," was the reflective dissent. And then: "This is the work of a spiteful enemy, Donald; not that of any friend, however harebrained. It is the work of some one who has a particular object in keeping us from getting back to civilization."

"We have been over all that ground until it is worn out," Prime broke in impatiently.

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"It is Grider; it can't be anybody else; and I wish I had potted him while I had the chance. But that is a back number now. The mischief is done and we must repair it if we can. Get your glue-pot ready and I'll go and hunt for some more of the sticky stuff."

Lucetta was laughing silently.

"We are so humanly inconsistent—both of us!" she commented. - "Yesterday we were almost willing to be sorry because our woods idyll couldn't last forever; and now we are ready to draw and quarter Mr. Grider—or whoever did this—because it makes the idyll last a few days longer."

It took them the better part of the day to patch the knife-gash, and, though the other patch seemed to be holding satisfactorily, they were doubtful of the results in the more serious hurt. It was impossible to devise any clamp for the greater rent, but they did their best, overlaying the fresh patches with clean sheets of the bark and weighting the whole down with flat stones carried laboriously from the river brink.

That night Prime slept with one eye open

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and with both guns where he could lay his hands upon them quickly. Somewhile past midnight he got up and built a small fire beyond the canoe as another measure of safety, locking the stable carefully after the horse had been stolen. When he went back to his blankets he found Lucetta up and sitting under the turned-up flap of the shelter-tent.

"Did you hear anything?" she inquired.

He shook his head. "No; I thought I'd light up a little more so that we couldn't be stalked again as we were last night."

"You are losing too much sleep. Let me have one of the guns and I'll keep watch for a while."

"What could you do with a gun?" he demanded gloomily.

"I can at least make a noise and waken you if needful."

There was no sleep for either of them for a long time; but after a while Prime lost himself, and when he awoke it was daylight and Lucetta was cooking breakfast.

On this day they were fairly out of an occupation. With the stone weightings re-

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moved, the canoe patches seemed to be sticking bravely, but they still required to be daubed with another coating of the pitch, which must dry thoroughly before they could venture upon a relaunching. The small job done, they took turns sleeping through the forenoon, and after the midday meal Prime went fishing, taking care, however, not to go beyond calling distance from the glade.

When night came they carried the precious canoe to the exact centre of the clear space and built a circle of small fires all around it, at the imminent risk of burning it up or at least of melting the pitch from its seams. The afternoon had been cloudy and there were indications of a storm. Prime made the fastenings of the shelter-tent secure and stowed the provisions under the overturned birch-bark, leaving a space where he could crawl under himself if the storm should break. For a long time after supper they sat together beside the cooking-fire. The mosquitoes were worse than usual, and Prime had provided some rotting wood for a smudge, in the reek of which they wept in sympathetic companionship.

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"Speaking of smoked meat," Prime grumbled, after they had exhausted all other topics, "that jerked stuff under the canoe hasn't any the best of us." Then, with a teasing switch to their rapidly disintegrating clothes: "How would you like to walk into your classroom in the girls' school just as you are?"

"Just about as well as you'd like to walk down Fifth Avenue under the same conditions," was the choking reply. "My! but that smoke is dreadful!"

"It is like the saw-off between any two evils: when you are enduring the one you think you'd rather endure the other. Let us hope and pray that this is the last night for us in this particular sheol, at least. I've heard and read a good bit about the insect pests of the northern woods, and I have always taken it with a grain of salt. That is another mistake I shall never make again."

"They were not bad on the St. Lawrence nor in Quebec," observed the other martyr.

The mention of Quebec started a new subject or, rather, revived an old one, and they fell to talking of their short experience

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in the historic city. One thing leading to another, Prime went more specifically into his evening excursion with the athletic young fellow who had seemed so anxious to increase the dividends of the motion-picture houses and the cafés.

"He was a handsome fellow, and he didn't begin to have the face of a villain," he commented. "A good talker too. He had travelled—been everywhere. One of the pictures we saw was a 'Western,' and that brought on more talk. I remember he told me a lot about his own experience in the British Columbia mines. It was great stuff. He had been manager and general factotum for some rich old money-bags—if he wasn't lying to me and making it all up out of whole cloth."

"He didn't do anything to make you suspect that he might have designs upon you?"

"Not a thing in the world. He was as frank and open-hearted as a boy. There wasn't anything peculiar about him except his habit of looking at his watch every few minutes. I asked him once if I was keeping him from an appointment, and he laughed

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and said he wished that I were; wished that he were well enough acquainted in the city to be able to make appointments."

"Did he tell you his name?" queried the weeping listener.

"He did, and ever since we woke up and found ourselves back yonder on the lake shore I have been trying to recall it. It is gone completely. 'Bender' is the nearest I can come to it, and that isn't it."

"Would you know it if you should hear it?"

"I am sure I should. It was a queer name, and I remember thinking at the time that I would jot it down and use it for the name of a character in a story—simply because it was so delightfully odd."

"Tell me," she broke in quickly; "was this young man of yours fair, with blue eyes, and hair that reminded you a little of a hay-field?"

"That is the man!"

"How would 'Bandish' do for the name?" she asked.

"You've got it! That's what it was. How in the name of all that is wonderful did you know?"

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"I was merely putting one and one together to make two," was the quiet rejoinder. "The young woman I was with that same night was Mrs. Bandish. She was the one whose careless sleeve-pin scratched my arm and put me to sleep."

"Then you knew them both?" Prime demanded.

"Only slightly. They claimed to be teachers from some little town in Indiana. I don't know where they joined our party, but I think it was before we took the St. Lawrence River boat. Anyway, it was somewhere in Canada. They were easy to get acquainted with. At first I didn't like the young woman any too well; there was something about her that gave me the idea that she was—well, that she was somehow too sophisticated. But that wore off. She was quick-witted and jolly, and both she and her husband were the life of the party coming down the big river."

"Do you suppose Grider bribed them to join the party and thus get you in tow?" Prime asked.

"No, I don't suppose anything of the

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kind. You are forgetting that Mr. Grider didn't even know of my existence at that time—if he does now," she added, after a moment's hesitation.

"Grider knew, and he knew that we were cousins," Prime insisted. "That is a guess, but you will see that it will turn out to be the right one. But even that doesn't explain why he should come up here in the woods and cut a hole in our canoe, confound him!"

"It doesn't explain a good many things which are much more mysterious than they were before," said Lucetta; and shortly after that she smoked her tent blue with a bit of smudge wood and disappeared for the night, leaving Prime to pull reflectively at a clumsy pipe which he had contrived to whittle out of a bit of birch wood during the day of waiting, to smoke and to hope that the threatening rain-storm would materialize and drown a few millions of the tormenting mosquitoes.

XV

JEAN BA'TISTE

ON a morning which Prime, consulting his notched stick, named as the twenty-fourth of July, they gave the canoe patches another daubing of pitch for good luck, relaunched their argosy, loaded the dunnage, and began to learn the art of paddling anew—the re-learning being made strictly necessary by the new green-wood paddles.

From a boisterous mill-race in its upper reaches, their river had now subsided into a broad stream with a current so leisurely that they had to paddle continuously to make any headway. With this handicap their progress was slow, and it was not until the afternoon of the second day that they began to see signs to hint that they were approaching the settlements.

The signs were neither numerous nor indicative of any recent habitancy: a few old clearings with their stumps weathered and rotting; here and there a spot luxuriantly

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green to mark an area where slashings had been burned; in one place a decaying runway to show where the logs had been skidded into the river; all these proved that they were not pioneers; but withal they saw no human being to dispute possession with them.

In the evening of this second day they camped on the right-hand bank a short distance below one of the old clearings, kindling their night fire a few yards from the river in a small grove of second-growth pines. The place was not entirely to their liking; the river-bank was high, and they could not draw the canoe out without partially unloading it. While Lucetta was busying herself with the supper, Prime, as a precautionary measure, made a porter of himself to the extent of carrying a good part of the dunnage up to the fire, and after thus lightening the canoe he hauled it out of water as far as the steep bank would permit.

While they were eating supper an unexpected guest turned up. Lucetta was the first to hear the dip of a paddle in the stream, and a moment later they both heard the

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grating of a boat bottom on the sand. Prime sprang up, rifle in hand, and went to meet the newcomer, prepared to do battle if needful. When he returned he was followed by a small man, dark, bearded, and with bead-like black eyes roving and shifty. He was dressed more like an Indian than a white man; there were fringes on his moccasins and also on the belted coat, which was much the worse for wear and hard usage.

“*Moi, Jean Ba'tiste; I mek you de good evenin', m'sieu' et madame,*” he said, introducing himself brusquely, and as he spoke the roving eyes were taking in every detail of the bivouac camp. Then, with no more ado, he squatted beside the fire and became their supper guest, saying simply: “You eat?—good; *moi, I eat, too.*”

Since there seemed to be no question of ceremony, Prime made the guest welcome, heaping his tin plate and pouring tea for him in the spare cup. The small man ate as if he were half starved, and was saving of speech during the process, though the roving eyes seemed to be doing double duty. The meal devoured, he produced a black

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clay pipe with a broken stem and uttered a single word, "Tabac'?" and when the want was supplied he crumbled himself a pipeful from the twist which Prime handed him.

Prime filled his own home-made pipe, and at its lighting the guest began a curt inquisition.

"W'ree you come from?"

Prime explained without going into any of the kidnapping details.

"You campin' out for fon, mebbe, yes?" was the next query.

"A little that way," said Prime.

"You shoot wiz ze gon? W'ree all dat game w'at you get?"

"It isn't the game season," Prime parried. "We haven't tried to shoot anything."

"But you 'ave ze gon. Lemme see 'um," holding out a hand for the rifle.

Prime passed over the gun nearest at hand and drew the other one up within reach. The inquisitive supper guest looked the weapon over carefully and seemed to be trying to read something in the scratches on the stock.

"*Vraiment!* she's one good gon," he com-



"*Vraiment!* she's one good gon," he commented. . . .
"W'ere you get 'um?"

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mented, passing it back. "W'ere you get 'um?"

Prime did not answer the question. He thought it was high time to ask a few of his own.

"What river is this?" he wanted to know.

"You make canoe on him and you not know dat? She is Mishamen; comes bimeby to Rivière du Lièvres."

"How far?"

"One, two, t'ree day; mebbe more."

"You mean that we will reach a town in two or three days?"

"Mebbe so, if you don' get los'."

Prime exchanged a quick glance with his fellow castaway. Lucetta signalled "Yes," and he acted accordingly.

"What will you charge to show us the way to the nearest town?" he asked.

The small man did not seem especially eager for money. He was examining the gun again. "*Moi*, I can't go—too bizzee. W'ere you got dis gon?"

"It came with our outfit," said Prime shortly. "We got it when we got the canoe."

"And w'ere you got dat canoe?"

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The inquisition was growing rather embarrassing, but Prime answered as best he could.

"We got the outfit up at the big lake where we started from. We have come all the way down the river."

With this the restless-eyed querist appeared to be satisfied. At all events he did not press the questioning any further, and was content to take another pipe-filling from Prime's tobacco twist and to tell a little more about himself. He was "one ver' great trapper," in his own phrase, and was also a "timber looker" for a lumber company. Lucetta had withdrawn to the privacy of her tent, and Prime could not divest himself of the idea that the small man whose tongue had been so suddenly loosened was merely sparring for time, time in which to accomplish some end of his own. In due course the battery was unmasked.

"You say you begin *voyageur* on ze big lake. W'ere you leave Jules Beaujeau an' Pierre Cambon, eh, w'at?"

"I don't know them," said Prime, telling the simple truth.

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"Dis Pierre Cambon's gon," said the little man, suddenly tapping the weapon he had been inspecting. "She 'ave hees name on ze stock. An' ze birch-bark down yonder; she's belong' to Jules Beaujeau. You buy 'um?"

Prime scarcely knew what to say; whether to tell the truth, which would not be believed, or to make up a lie, which might be believed. As a compromise he chose a middle course, which is always the most dangerous.

"I don't know these two you speak of, by name; but the two men who owned the canoe and the guns are both dead."

The supper guest sprang up as if a bomb had been exploded under him and quickly put a safe distance between himself and the camp-fire.

"You—you kill 'um?" he demanded.

"No; come back here and sit down. They had a fight and killed each other."

The man returned hesitantly and squatted beside the fire to press another live coal into the bowl of his pipe. Prime switched the talk abruptly.

"You'd better change your mind about

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the offer I made you and pilot us to the nearest town. We will pay you well for it."

"You got money?" was the short question.

"Plenty of it."

At this the "ver' great trapper" assumed to take the proposal under consideration, smoking other pipes, chaffering and bargaining and prolonging his stay deep into the night. When he finally took his leave, saying that he must go on to his camp, which was a few miles up one of the smaller tributaries of the main stream, it was with a half promise to come back in the morning for the piloting.

Prime took counsel of prudence and did not settle himself for the night immediately after the sharp-eyed one had gone. Laying his pipe aside, he crept cautiously out to the river-bank and assured himself that his late visitor was doing what he had said he would do, namely, heading off up the river with clean, quick strokes of the paddle, which soon sent his light craft out of sight. Prime climbed down the bank, satisfied him-

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self that the patched canoe and its partial lading had not been disturbed, and then went back to the fire to roll himself in his blankets. The incident, with its inquisitorial pryings, had been rather disturbing, in a way, but it was apparently an incident closed.

Turning in so late after a laborious day on the river, Prime overslept the next morning, and when he awoke he found Lucetta already up and frying the bacon.

"Your man didn't stay all night?" she questioned, after Prime had scolded her for not making him get up and do his part.

"No; he sat here until between ten and eleven o'clock and gave me two or three bad minutes. He recognized our canoe and one of the guns, told me the names of the dead men, and wanted to know what had become of them."

"You didn't tell him?" she gasped.

"In the cold light of the morning after, I am afraid I told him too much or too little. I told him the men who owned the canoe and its outfit were dead; that they'd had a fight and killed each other. Candidly, I

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don't think he believed it. It scared him until I thought he was going to have a fit. I had to jolly him up a bit before he would come back to the fire and talk some more."

"What does he believe?" she inquired anxiously.

"He wouldn't tell me, and I couldn't decide by merely looking at him. I hope I've hired him to pilot us to the nearest town. When he went away he intimated that he might be back this morning."

"Shall we wait for him?"

"No; if he isn't here by the time we are ready to start, we'll go on and take our chance of 'gettin' los,' as he put it. I think that was a bluff, anyway."

They breakfasted leisurely, and Prime even took time to smoke a pipe before beginning to break camp. But his first trip to the river-bank with a load of the dunnage brought him back on a run.

"Our canoe's gone!" he announced breathlessly. "That little wretch came back and stole it while we were asleep!"

Lucetta sat down and propped her chin in her hands.

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"This is the beginning of the end, Donald," she said quite calmly and with a touch of resignation in her voice. "Do you know why he took the canoe?"

"Because he's an infernal thief!" Prime raged hotly.

"No," she contradicted. "It is because he thinks we have murdered the two owners of the canoe, and he wanted to make sure that we wouldn't run away while he went after help to arrest us."

XVI

MARCHONS!

PRIME leaned against a tree and took a full minute for a grasping of the new situation.

"I more than half believe you are right," he admitted at length. Then, with a crabbed laugh: "If there is any bigger dunce on earth than I am I should like to meet him—just as a matter of curiosity. I'll never brag on my imagination after this. I could see plainly enough that the fellow was fairly eaten up with suspicion, and it would have been so easy to have invented a plausible lie to satisfy him."

"Don't be sorry for that," the young woman put in quickly. "If they arrest us we shall have to tell the truth."

Prime was frowning thoughtfully. "That is where the shoe pinches. Do you realize that the story we have to tell is one that no sane magistrate or jury could ever believe,

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Lucetta? These two men, Beaujeau and Cambon, must have started from some known somewhere, alive and well. They disappear, and after a while we turn up in possession of their belongings and try to account for ourselves by telling a fantastic fairy-tale. It's simply hopeless!"

"You are killing the only suggestion I had in mind," was the dispirited rejoinder. "I was going to say that we might wait here until they came for us, but that won't do at all. We must hurry and disappear before they come back and find us!"

"I think it will be best," Prime decided promptly. "If we had a reasonable story to tell it would be different. But we haven't, and the chances are that we should get into all sorts of trouble trying to explain for other people a thing that we can't explain for ourselves. It is up to us to hit the trail. Are you fit for it?"

"Why shouldn't I be?" she asked, but there was no longer the old-time buoyancy in her tone.

"I have had a notion the last day or two that you were not feeling quite up to the

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mark," Prime explained soberly. "It is something about your eyes; they look heavy, as if you hadn't had sleep enough."

"I can do my part of anything that we have to do," she returned, rising; and together they made a judicious division of the dunnage, deciding what they could take and what they must leave behind.

The uncertainties made the decision hard to arrive at. If the tramp should last no more than three or four days they could carry the necessary food without much difficulty. But they could scarcely afford to give up the blankets and the shelter-tent, and Prime insisted that they must take at least one of the guns and the axe. These extras, with the provisions and the cooking-utensils, made one light load and one rather heavy one, and under this considerable handicap the day's march was begun.

The slow progress was difficult from the very outset. Since the river was their only guide, they did not dare to leave it to seek an easier path. By noon Prime saw that his companion was keeping up by sheer force of will, and he tried to get her to consent to a

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halt for the afternoon. But she would not give up.

"No," she insisted. "We must go on. I am tired; I'll admit it; but I should be something worse than tired if we should have to stop and be overtaken."

From the beginning of the day's march they seemed to have left behind all of the former hopeful signs, and were once more making their way through a primeval forest, untouched, so far as they could see, by the woodsman's axe. Their night camp was made among the solemn spruces by the side of a little brook winding its way to the nearby river. Prime made a couch of the spruce-tips, the folded tent cloth, and the blankets, and persuaded Lucetta to lie down while he prepared the supper.

When the meal was ready the substitute cook was the only one who could eat. Lucetta said she didn't care for anything but a cup of tea, and when Prime took it to her he saw that the slate-gray eyes were unnaturally bright and her face was flushed. Whereat a great fear seized upon him.

"You are sick!" he exclaimed, grappling

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helplessly with the unnerving fear. "Why didn't you tell me before? I thought—I hoped you were just tired out with the long tramp."

"I shall be better in the morning," she answered bravely. "It has been coming on for a day or two, I think. Why did we camp here in this close place, where it is so hot?"

Prime gripped his fleeting courage and held it hard. It was not hot under the spruces; on the contrary, the evening was almost chilly. Bestirring himself quickly to do what little he was able to do, he moved the sick one gently and set up the tent to shelter her, dipped the remaining bit of the soft deerskin into the brook and made a cold compress for the aching head, and then sat down with a birch-bark fan to keep the mosquitoes away.

As the night wore on he realized more and more his utter helplessness. He had had no experience with sickness or with the care of the sick, and if the remedies had been at hand he would not have known how to use them. Time and again, after Lucetta had fallen into a troubled sleep, he made

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his way to the river-bank to stare anxiously in the darkness up and down the stream in the faint hope that help might appear. But for all his longings the silent river gave back neither sight nor sound.

In the morning Lucetta's fever had abated, but it had left her weak and exhausted; much too weak to continue the march, though she was willing and anxious to make the trial. Prime vetoed that at once and tried his best to concoct something out of their diminished store of provisions that would prove appetizing to the invalid. She ate a little of the broth prepared from the smoked deer meat merely to please him, and drank thirstily of the tea; but still Prime was not encouraged.

During the afternoon Lucetta's temperature rose again, and, harassed and anxious as he was, Prime was thankful that the fever did not make her delirious. That, he told himself, would be the final straw. So far from wandering, she was able to talk to him; to talk and to thank him gratefully for his earnest but skilless attempts to make her more comfortable.

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"It is simply maddening to think that there isn't anything really helpful that I can do," he protested, at one of these pathetic little outbreaks of gratitude. "What do they do for people who have fevers?"

"Quinine," she said, with a twitching of the lips which was meant to be a smile. "Why don't you give me a good big dose of quinine, Donald?"

"Yes, why don't I?" he lamented. "Why do I have to sit here like a bump on a log and do nothing!"

"You mustn't worry," she interposed gently. "You are not responsible for me and my aches and pains. You must try to remember that only a little more than three weeks ago we were total strangers to each other."

"Three weeks ago and now are two vastly different things, Lucetta. You have proved yourself to be the bravest, pluckiest little comrade that a man ever had! And I—I, whose life you have saved, can do nothing for you in your time of need. It's heart-breaking!"

The night, which came on all too slowly

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for the man who could do nothing, was even less hopeful than the previous one had been. Though he had no means of measuring it, Prime was sure that the fever rose higher. For himself he caught only cat-naps now and then during the long hours, and between two of these he went to the river-bank and built a signal-fire on the remote chance of summoning help in that way.

Between two and three o'clock in the morning the fever began to subside again, and the poor patient awoke. She was perfectly reasonable but greatly depressed, not so much over her own condition as on Prime's account. Again she sought to make him take the purely extraneous view, and when that failed she talked quite calmly about the possibilities.

"I have had so little sickness that I hardly know whether this is really serious or not," she said. "But if I shouldn't—if anything should happen to me, I hope you won't—you won't have to bury me in the river."

"For Heaven's sake, don't talk that way!" he burst out. "You're not going to die! You *mustn't* die!"

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"I am sure I don't want to," she returned. "Especially just now, when I was beginning to learn how to live. May I have a drink of water?"

He went to the brook and got it for her, raging inwardly at the thought that he could not even offer her a drink out of a vessel that wouldn't taste tinny. When her thirst was quenched she went on half musingly.

"I am glad there isn't any one to be so very sorry, Donald. I know it must be fine to have a family and to be surrounded by all kinds of love and affection; but those things carry terrible penalties. Did you ever think of that?"

"I hadn't," he confessed. "I've been a sort of lonesome one, myself."

"The penalties work both ways," she went on. "It breaks your heart to have to leave the loved ones, and it breaks theirs to have you go. I suppose the girls in the school will be sorry; they all seem to like me pretty well, even if I am a 'cross old maid,' as one of them once called me to my face."

"I can't imagine you cross; and as to your being old, why you're nothing but a kid,

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Lucetta—just a poor little sick kiddy. And, goodness knows, you've had enough to knock you out and to make you think all sorts of grubby thoughts. You mustn't; you are going to get well again, and we'll march along together the same as ever. Or perhaps the sheriff will find us, after all. I've kindled a big fire down on the river-bank so that he won't have any excuse for overlooking us. Day before yesterday I would have tramped twenty miles to dodge him, but to-night I'd welcome him with open arms."

"We were foolish to try to run away," she said. "And that was my fault, too. The—the next time you are kidnapped, you must be careful not to let yourself be tied to a petticoat, Cousin Donald. They are always in the way."

"If I hadn't been tied to a petticoat that could swim, I shouldn't be here to-night fanning the mosquitoes away from you," he retorted, with a laugh that was meant to be cheering. And then he reverted to his one overwhelming and blankly insoluble problem: "If I only knew what to do for you!"

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"When I was a little girl we lived in the country, and my mother doctored the entire neighborhood with roots and herbs. It is a pity I haven't inherited a little of her skill, isn't it?"

"There are lashings of pitiful things in this world, Lucetta, and we are getting acquainted with a few of them right now. But I mustn't let you talk too much. Try to go to sleep, if you can, and get a little rest before the fever comes on again."

She closed her eyes obediently, and after a time he knew by her regular breathing that she was asleep. For a patient hour he kept the birch-bark fan in motion and with the first streakings of dawn got up stiffly to make his way to the river-bank, dragging with him a half-rotted log to turn the pillar-of-fire signal into a pillar of smoke.

XVII

ROOTS AND HERBS

THE dawning of the second day in the camp under the great spruces found Prime still struggling desperately with the problem of what to do. Lucetta's condition seemed to be rather worse than better. There was the usual morning abatement of the fever, but she was evidently growing weaker. Prime's too vivid imagination pictured an impending catastrophe, and the canoe thief, no less than Watson Grider, came in for wordless and despairing maledictions. If the canoe had not been stolen they might by now be within reach of help.

It was when matters were at this most distressing pass that the writing-man's invention, pricked alive by what Lucetta had said concerning her mother's skill with simples, opened a temerarious door of hope. Making his charge as comfortable as he could, and leaving a cup of water where she could reach it, he told her he was going for a walk.

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Taking the brook for a pathfinder, he traced its course until it led him into a region of opener spaces where there was a better chance for ground growth. In the first weed patch he came to he began to pluck and taste. Unhappily, his knowledge of botany was perilously near a minus quantity; there were few of the weeds that he knew even by name. At the imminent risk of poisoning himself, he went on, chewing a leaf here and there, not knowing in the least what he was looking for, but having an inchoate idea that a febrifuge ought to be something bitter.

The tasting process gave him a variety of new experiences. The leaves of one weed burned his mouth like fire, and he had to stop and plunge his face into the brook to extinguish the conflagration. Those of another made him deathly sick. Finally he came to a tall plant with bluish-white flowers which looked familiar, in a way, though he could not recall its name. A chewed leaf convinced him at once that he need seek no farther. There was the bitterness of hopeless sorrow in its horrible acridity; it clung to him tenaciously while he was gathering

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an armful of the plant, and went with him on his return to the camp—this, in spite of the fact that he stopped frequently to wash his mouth with brook water.

"What have you there?" was Lucetta's query when he came in with his burden.

"I don't know, but I am hoping you can tell me," he said, giving her a spray of the weed to look at. "Have you ever seen it before?"

"Hundreds of times," she returned. "It is a common weed in Ohio. But I haven't the slightest idea what it is."

Prime groaned. "More of the town-bred education," he deprecated. "But never mind; they can't call us nature-fakirs, whatever other foolish name we may be earning for ourselves."

"What are you going to do with it?" she asked.

"Wait and you'll see."

With the bread-mixing tin for a stew-pan Prime made a rich decoction of the leaves. When the mess began to simmer and steam the poor patient raised herself on one elbow to look at it.

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"You are not going to make me drink all that, are you, Donald?" she protested weakly.

"Oh, no; not all of it. Wait until it's properly cooked and I'll show you what I am going to do with it."

The cooking took some time, but the culinary effort offered a mild diversion and was at least a change from the deadly routine of doing nothing. The steam rising from the stewing leaves gave off a peculiarly afflicting odor, and Lucetta sniffed it apprehensively.

"It smells very horrible," she ventured.
"Is it going to taste as bad as it smells?"

"That, my dear girl, is on the knees of the gods," he returned oracularly.

"How did you find it?" she wanted to know.

"By the simple process of cut and try. And I can assure you that, however bad it may smell or taste, it hasn't anything on some of the leaves I've been chewing this morning."

When the dose was sufficiently cooked Prime fished the leaves out of the liquor

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with a forked twig, and carried the stew-pan to the brook to take the scalding edge off of the ill-smelling decoction.

"Are you ready to be poisoned?" he asked when he came back.

"You're—you're sure it *isn't* poison, aren't you?" she quavered.

"No, but I am going to be," and with that he shut his eyes, held his breath, and took a long drink from the stew-pan of fate, disregarding easily, in the frightful bitterness of the draft, Lucetta's little cry of dismay.

"Merely trying it on the dog," he gasped when he put the pan down and turned away so that she should not see the face contortions—grimaces forthshowing the resentment of an outraged palate. Then he went to sit on his blanket-roll to await results. "If—if it doesn't kill me, then you can try it; but—but we'll wait a few minutes and see what it's going to do to me."

When the results proved to be merely embittering and not immediately deadly, he became a nurse again.

"I have left it as hot as you can drink it,"

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he said, offering the basin. "It seems as if it ought to do more good that way. Take a good long swig, if you can stand it."

Lucetta put her lips to the mixture and made a face of disgust.

"Ou-e-e-e!—*boneset!*!" she shuddered. "I'd know it if I should meet it in another world—it takes me right back to my childhood and mother's roots and herbs! I can't, Donald; I simply *can't* drink all of that!"

"Drink as much as you can. It's good for little sick people," he urged, trying to twist the wryness of his own aftermath into a smile. "If the horrible taste counts for anything, it ought to make you well in five minutes."

Lucetta did her duty bravely, and when the worst was over Prime tucked her up in the blankets, adding his own for good measure. Then he made up a roasting fire, having some vague notion brought over from his boyhood that fever patients ought to sweat. Past this, he made a sad cake of pan-bread for his own midday meal, and when it was eaten he found that Lucetta had fallen asleep, and was further encouraged when he saw that

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fine little beads of perspiration had broken out on her forehead.

It was late in the afternoon before she awoke and called him.

"Are you feeling any better?" he asked.

"Much better; only I'm so warm I feel as if I should melt and run away. Can't you take at least one of the blankets off?"

"Not yet. You like to cook things, and I am giving you some of your own medicine. This is Domestic Science as applied to the human organization. Just imagine you are a missionary on one of the South Sea Islands, and that you are going to be served up presently *à la Fiji*. Shall I try to fix you up something to eat?"

"Not yet. But I feel as if I could drink the brook dry."

"No cold water," he decided authoritatively. "The doctor forbids it. But you may have another drink of hot boneset tea."

"Oh, please, not again!" she pleaded; and at that he made her a cup of the other kind of tea, which she drank gratefully.

"Taste good?" he inquired.

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"It tastes like the boneset—everything is going to taste like boneset for the next six weeks."

"Don't I know?" he chuckled. "Hasn't it already spoiled my dinner for me? I could taste it in everything." Then he told her about his experiment in pan-bread, adding: "I have saved a piece of it so that if you wish to commit suicide after you get well, the means will be at hand."

"Do you think I am going to get well, Donald?"

"Sure you are! You'll have to do it in self-defense. Just think of the oceans of bitterness you'll have to swallow if you don't. What is puzzling me now is to know what I am going to feed you. Do you suppose you could tell me how to make some pap or gruel, or something of that sort?"

She smiled at this, as he hoped she would, and said there was no need of crossing that bridge until they should come to it. Shortly after this she fell asleep again, and by night-fall Prime was overjoyed to find that her breathing was more natural, and that the fever was not rising. With the coming of

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the darkness a fine breeze blew up from the river, and he was overjoyed again when it proved strong enough to drive the tormenting mosquitoes back into the forest.

That night he was able to make up some of the lost sleep of the two preceding nights, and when daybreak came another burden was lifted. Lucetta had slept all night, and she declared she was feeling much better; that the fever seemed to be entirely gone. This brought the question of nourishment to the fore again, and Prime attacked it bravely, opening their last tin of peas and making a broth of the liquor thickened with a little of the reground flour. Lucetta ate it to oblige him, though it was as flat and tasteless as any unsalted mixture must be.

"Are you always as good as this to every strange woman you meet, Cousin Donald?" she said, meaning to make the query some expression of her own gratitude.

"Always," he returned promptly. "I can't help it, you know; I'm built that way. But you are no strange woman, Lucetta. If I can't do more for you, I couldn't very well do less. We are partners, and

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thus far we have shared things as they have come along—the good and the bad. What is troubling me most now is the same thing that was troubling me last night: I don't know what I am going to feed you. You need a meat broth of some kind."

"Not any more of the smoked venison, please!" she begged.

"No, it ought to be fresh meat of some sort. By and by, if the fever doesn't come back, I'll take the gun and see if I can't get a rabbit. I saw three yesterday morning while I was out chewing leaves. You won't be afraid to be left alone for a little while, will you?"

"After what we have been through, I think I shall never be afraid of anything again," she averred soberly. "And to think that I was once afraid of a mouse!"

"That is nothing," he laughed; "you probably will be afraid of a mouse again when you get back to an environment in which the mouse is properly an object of terror. I shan't think any the less of you if that does happen."

She smiled up at him.

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"Men always talk so eloquently about the womanly woman: just what do they mean by that, Donald? Is it the mouse-coward?"

"It differs pretty widely with the man, I fancy," he returned. "I know my own ideal."

"She is the imaginary girl whose picture you are going to show me when we get out?"

He laughed happily. "You mustn't make me talk about that girl now, Lucetta. Some day I'll tell you all about her. Perhaps it is only fair to say that she is not so terribly imaginary as she might be."

"Of course not—if you have her picture," was the quiet reply; and a little while after that she told him she was sleepy again, and that he might take the gun and go after a rabbit if that was what he wished to do.

She did go to sleep, but Prime did not go hunting until after the midday meal; and thus it happened that when Lucetta awoke, along in the afternoon, she found herself alone. For an hour or two she was content to lie quietly, waiting for Prime to return,

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but when the afternoon drew to a close and he still failed to put in an appearance she got up, rather totteringly, and replenished the camp-fire.

Another hour passed and she began to grow anxious. The spruce grove was plunged in shadows, but the sun had not yet set for the upper regions of the air. By the time it was fully dark she knew that Prime was lost, and in this new terror she was able to forget, in some measure at least, the effects of her late illness. Bestirring herself once more, she put more wood on the fire, hoping that it might blaze high enough to serve as a signal for the wanderer.

It was all she could do, and having done it she sat down to wait, her anxiety growing sharper as the evening wore on and there was neither sight nor sound to foreshadow the lost one's return.

XVIII

HEIGHTS AND DEPTHS

IF she had not known it before, Lucetta was to learn now that sickness of any sort is but a poor preparation for a battle of anxiety and endurance. On the one other occasion when she had been thrown upon her own resources Prime had been at least visibly present, and his helplessness had given her strength to fight off the terrors. But now she was alone and the terrors pressed thickly.

What if something had happened to the rabbit-hunter? She knew his utter lack of gun dexterity, and her terrified imagination conjured up harrowing pictures of the missing one lying wounded and helpless in some distant forest solitude, a victim of his unselfish effort to provide not for his own needs but for hers. The thought was a keen torture, but she could not banish it, and as the hours lengthened it threatened to drive her mad. There was nothing she could do save

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to keep the fire burning brightly, and this she did, breaking the monotony of the unnerving suspense from time to time by collecting dry wood to heap upon the blaze.

It was nearly midnight before the agony came to a sudden end. She was lying on the blanket pallet, with her face hidden in the crook of an elbow when she looked up and saw Prime standing beside her. It was not in human nature to undergo the revulsion from the depths of despair calmly.

“Donald!” she shrieked faintly, and forgetting her weakness, she sprang up and flung herself into his arms, sobbing in an ecstasy of relief.

He took it in good brotherly fashion, and if the fraternal attitude was not strictly sincere, it was made to appear so.

“There, there, little woman,” he comforted, “you mustn’t turn loose that way—you’ll make yourself sick again. It’s all over now, and I got your rabbit. See, here it is”—drawing it from his pocket and dangling it before her as if it were a new toy and she a child to be hastily diverted.

The diversion was not needed; she was

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freeing herself from the clasp of the remaining reassuring arm, and her cheeks were aflame.

"I didn't know I could be so silly! Please don't hold it against me, Donald," she begged. "If you only knew what I have been through since it grew dark! You'll forgive me and—and not remember it after we—after we——"

His weariness fell from him like a cast-off garment. "Not if you don't want me to, Lucetta. But it was rather—er—pleasant, you know—to find that some one really cared enough about what had become of me to—to sort of forget herself for a moment."

The firelight was strong, and if he saw the adoring look that flashed into the gray eyes he was magnanimous enough, or modest enough, to pass it over to the sudden transition from despair to relief.

"It must have been something fierce for you," he went on; "but I did the best I could after I had been idiotic enough to get lost. Of course, since I had the gun with me, it was hours before I got sight of a rabbit; and even then I had to shoot at half a dozen

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of them before I could manage to hit one. By that time it was getting on toward sunset, and I had lost the brook which I had taken for a guide."

"I knew you would," she broke in. "But that wasn't the worst of it. I kept imagining that you had shot yourself accidentally, and every time I closed my eyes I could see you lying wounded and helpless!"

"You poor little worrier!" he pitied; "I knew you would be scared stiff if I didn't get back by dark, and in my hurry I bore too far to the left; a great deal too far, as it turned out, for when I reached the river I recognized the place. It was just this side of the grove where we were camping when the canoe was stolen."

"Horrors!" she gasped faintly. "And you have walked all that distance?"

"No," he grinned; "I ran a good part of it. When I came in a few minutes ago I was dead from the waist down; but I am all right now. You sit down and think broth while I skin this rabbit. It's a juicy one—as fat as butter."

Fifteen minutes later the rabbit was stew-

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ing in the larger skillet, and Prime found time to ask Lucetta how she was feeling.

"Just plain hungry," she returned. "The fever hasn't come back any more, and if I ever have a medicine-chest of my own there will be boneset in it; great, big, smelly packages of it. Aren't you going to let me make a bit of bread to eat with that delicious gravy broth?"

"If it won't tire you too much," he consented, and at that he sat back and watched her while she mixed the bread, a housewifely little figure kneeling before the fire and patting the dough into a cake with hands that not all the rough work of the adventure weeks had made misshapen.

Somewhat beyond this they made their post-midnight meal, and were once more light-hearted and care-free. In the aftermath of it, when Prime had lighted his home-made pipe, they were even buoyant enough to plan for the future.

"We'll go on again to-morrow, shan't we?" the young woman assumed. "We can't be so very far from the towns now, with the river grown so large."

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"I fancy we are nearer than we thought we were," Prime replied. "Over to the west, where I went this afternoon, there is another and still larger river. On its banks the timber has all been cut off and there is nothing but second and third growth. It is a safe bet that the two rivers come together a little below here, and if we are not stopped by our inability to cross the bigger river——"

"We are not going to be stopped," she prophesied hopefully. "I have a feeling that our troubles, or the worst of them, are all over."

Prime smiled. "The joyous reaction is still with you, but that is all right and just as it should be. We'll keep on going until we come to a town or a railroad, and then——"

She was sufficiently light-hearted to laugh with him when he glanced down at his torn and travel-worn clothes.

"And then we shall be arrested for tramps," she finished for him. "There is one consolation—neither of us will look any worse than the other."

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"When we find a town we shall find clothes," he asserted. "Luckily we have English money to buy with."

"Would you—would you spend that money?" she asked, half fearfully.

"Why not? I'd hock the dead men themselves if we had them and there wasn't any other way to raise the wind. But I have some good, old-fashioned American money, too."

"I shall have to borrow of you when we get to where we can buy things," she said, with a sudden access of shyness that was new to him. "I had a purse with a little money in it that night at Quebec, but it disappeared."

"What is mine is yours, Lucetta; surely you don't have to be told that, at this stage of the game."

"Thank you," she said softly. "That goes with everything else you have done for me." Then, after a pause: "Will you tell the other girl about this—about this adventure of ours, Donald?"

"Don't you think I ought to tell her? Isn't it her right to know?"

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She took time to consider.

"I'm not sure; women are singular about some things; they don't always understand. Perhaps they don't care to understand—too much. Then there is always the difficulty of explaining things just as they were. I could tell better if I knew the girl. Is she young?"

"Why, y-yes—some years younger than I am. But she is all kinds of sensible."

"Is she in New York?"

"No," he answered soberly. "She is not in New York."

She took it as a hint that she was not to ask any more questions about the girl and changed the subject abruptly.

"Shall you go and look for Mr. Grider after we find a railroad?"

"Not immediately. I shall first see you safe at home in your girls'-school town in Ohio," he assured her firmly.

"Oh, that won't be necessary," she protested. "I have travelled alone many times. And I have my return ticket; or I shall have it when I get back to Quebec."

"Nevertheless, I am going home with

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you," Prime insisted stubbornly. "It is up to me to see you out of this, and I shall make a job of it while I am about it. When it is done I shall come back to Canada to find out who shanghaied us and what for. And when I find the people who did it they are going to pay for it."

"Even if they include Mr. Grider?"

"Yes, by Jove! Even if the man higher up happens to be Watson Grider. I don't mind the kidnapping so much for myself, but the man doesn't live, Lucetta, who can make you go through what you have gone through in the past month and get away with it."

"I don't ask you to fight for me, Donald," she interposed. "And, besides, it hasn't been all bad—or has it?"

"We have agreed every little while, between jolts, that it hasn't. I'll go further now, and say that it is the finest, truest, happiest thing that has ever happened to me—hardships and all."

"You mean because it has given you new working material?"

"No; I wasn't thinking so much of that,

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though the new material, and more especially the new angle, are worth something, of course. But there are bigger consequences than these—for me—Lucetta.” Then he broke off and plunged headlong into something else. “How much of an income should a man have before he can ask a girl to marry him? Does the Domestic Science course include any such practical data as that?”

“Is that all you are waiting for?” she inquired, ignoring his question. “Have you asked the girl?”

“No; I haven’t asked her yet. And the money is the main thing that I shall be waiting for from this time on.”

“I should say it would depend entirely upon the girl—upon what she had been used to.”

“I think—she hasn’t—been used to having things made so very soft for her,” he answered rather uncertainly. “But she has at least one ambition that is going to ask for a good chunk of money at first, until she—until she gets ready to—to settle down.”

“And that is——?”

The suggestive query was never answered.

"None o' that, now! Ye'll be puttin' yer hands up ower yer heids—the baith o' ye—or it'll be the waur f'r ye!"



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As Prime laid his pipe aside and was about to speak, the dark backgrounding of shadows beyond the circle of firelight filled suddenly with a rush of men. Prime saw the glint of the firelight upon a pair of brown gun-barrels, and when he mechanically reached for his own weapon a harsh voice with a broad Scottish burr in it broke raggedly into the stillness.

“None o’ that, now! Ye’ll be puttin’ yer hands up ower yer heids—the baith o’ ye—or it’ll be the waur f’r ye! I’d have ye know I’m an under-sheriff o’ this deestrict, and ye’ll be reseestin’ the officers o’ the law at yer eril!”

XIX

IN DURANCE VILE

PRIME stood up, spreading his empty hands in reasonable token of submission.

"If you are an officer of the law we have no notion of resisting you," he said placably.
"What is the charge against us?"

"Ye'll be knowin' that weel enough, I'm thinkin'. Whaur's Indian Jules and the Cambon man? Maybe ye can tell me that! Aiblins ye'd better not, though. I'll gie ye fair warnin' that whatever ye say'll be used against ye."

There seemed to be nothing for it but an unconditional surrender. Prime looked the posse over appraisively as the men composing it moved forward into the circle of firelight. The under-sheriff was what his speech declared him to be—a Scotchman; stubby, square-built, clean-shaven, with a graying fringe of hair over his ears, a hard-lined mouth, shrewd eyes under penthouse brows,

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and a portentous official frown. His posse men were apparently either "river hogs" or saw-mill hands—rough-looking young fellows giving the impression that they would obey orders with small regard for consequences. Prime saw nothing hopeful in the Scotchman's face, but it occurred to him that a too easy yielding might be construed as an admission of guilt.

"I take it that a false arrest and imprisonment is actionable in Canada, as well as in the United States," he threw out coolly, helping Lucetta to her feet. "We'll be glad to have you take us with you—but not as prisoners." And thereupon he briefed for the square-built one the story of the kidnapping and its results.

"And ye're expectin' me to believe any such fule's rubbish as that?" snapped the Scotchman wrathfully when the tale was told.

"You can believe it or not, as you choose; it is the plain truth. We'll go along with you cheerfully, and be grateful enough to you or to anybody who will show us the way out of this wilderness. But, as to the crime

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you are charging us with, there isn't a particle of evidence, and you know it."

"There's evidence to hang the baith of ye! Ye've admitted that the half-breeds are baith deid; and John Baptist will swear that ye had their canoe and Cambon's gun. For the matter o' that, ye're not denyin' it, yerself."

"We are merely wasting time," put in Prime quietly. "You evidently have no wish to be convinced; and if you are willing to take the chance of making a false arrest you may have your own way. Let me say first, though, that this lady is just recovering from a severe attack of fever, and you will be held strictly accountable if you make her endure any unreasonable hardships."

"'Tis not for you to make terms," was the irascible rejoinder, and then to his men: "Tie their hands, and we'll be goin'."

"One moment," Prime interposed; and stooping swiftly he caught up the rifle. "You may do anything you please to me, but the first man who lays a hand on the lady is going to get himself killed."

The under-sheriff screwed out a bleak smile at the naïve simplicity of the threat.

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"And if we say 'Yes,' and truss you up first," he suggested, "what'll ye be doin' then?"

"I shall take your word for it as from one gentleman to another," was Prime's quick concession, and with that he dropped the gun and held out his hands.

They bound him securely with buckskin thongs, and at a word from the Scotchman the camp dunnage was gathered up, the fire trodden out, and a shift was made to the river-bank. A three-quarter moon, riding high, showed the two captives a large birch-bark drawn out upon the sands. The embarkation was quickly accomplished, the under-sheriff planting himself amidships with his two prisoners, and the four posse-men taking the paddles as if they had been bred to it.

After an hour or more of swift downstream gliding the current quickened and a sound like the wind sweeping through the tree-tops warned the voyagers that they were approaching a rapid. At this the canoe was sent ashore and the Scotchman changed places with his bow-man, letting the change

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stand even after the slight hazard of quick water was passed. Prime soon saw that his new guard was nodding, and bent to whisper to his fellow captive:

"This is mighty hard for you—after yesterday and last night," he protested. "Can't you shift a little and lean against me?"

"I am doing quite well," was the low-toned answer. And then: "What is going to come of all this, Donald?"

"We shall get out of the woods for one thing. And for another we are going to hope that a real court will not be so obstinately suspicious as this Scotchman. But, whatever lies ahead, we must just stand by and face it out—together. They can't punish us for a crime that we didn't commit."

There was silence for another half-hour, and then Lucetta whispered again.

"Which pocket is your penknife in?" she asked.

"The right-hand pocket of my waistcoat. What are you going to do?"

"I am going to cut the thongs. It is barbarously cruel for them to leave you tied this way!"

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"No," he forbade. "That would only make matters worse. The buckskin is not hurting me much. Lean your head against my shoulder and see if you can't get a little sleep."

At the morning breakfast halt Prime tried to extract a bit of geographical information from the Scotchman. It was given grudgingly. During the night they had passed from their own river to the larger Rivière du Lièvres and they were still twenty-four hours or more from their destination—a place with a long French name that Prime did not catch and which the Scotchman would not repeat. For the first time in their wanderings the two castaways ate a meal that they had not prepared for themselves; and Prime, observing anxiously, was glad to note that Lucetta's wilderness appetite seemed to be returning.

Throughout the day, during which the crew took turns paddling and sleeping, the big birch-bark held to its down-stream course. But now the scenery was changing with each fresh looping of the crooked river, the River of the Hares. Recent timber-cuttings ap-

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peared; the river broadened into lake-like reaches; here and there upon the banks there were lumber camps; in the afternoon a small town was passed, and later the site of another that had been destroyed by a landslide.

With an eye single to his purpose, the Scotchman made no noon stop, and the supper fire was built on the right-hand bank of the broadened stream at a spot where there were no signs of human habitation. As at the breakfast, Prime's bonds were taken off to permit him to feed himself, and when the voyage was resumed they were not put on again.

"The wumman tells me ye can't swim, and I'm takin' her word for it," was the gruff explanation. "If ye go overboard in the night, I'll juist lat ye droon."

With his hands free, Prime asked if he might smoke. The permission was given, and, since they had confiscated Prime's store of tobacco with the remainder of the dunnage, the Scotchman opened his heart and his tobacco-pouch in the prisoner's behalf, filling his own pipe at the same time. When

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the dottles were glowing, the under-sheriff thawed another degree or so.

"D'ye mean to tell me that ye're goin' to hold to that rideeculous story of yours in the coort?" he questioned. "It may do for auld Sandy Macdougal, the under-sheriff; but ye'll no be expectin' a jury to listen till it."

Prime laughed soberly. "I wish, for your sake and our own, Mr. Macdougal, that we had a more believable story to tell. But facts are hard matters to evade. Things have happened to us precisely as I have tried to tell you. We were drugged in Quebec and abducted—carried off in an air-machine, as well as we can reason it out—and that is all there is to it. We don't know any more than you do what we were kidnapped for—or by whom."

"Weel, ye're a main lang ways from Quebec the noo—some twa hunnerd miles or mair. And ye're not dressed for the timmer."

"Hardly," said Prime.

Macdougal jerked a thumb over his shoulder toward Lucetta. "Is the wumman yer wife?"

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"No; we are distant cousins, though we had never met before the morning when we found ourselves on the shore of the big lake."

"Ye mean that ye were strangers to each other?"

"Just that. Up to that moment neither had known of the existence of the other."

The Scotchman stared hard at Prime from beneath his shaggy brows.

"Young man, ye'll juist be tellin' me what's yer business, when ye're not trollopin' round in the timmer with a young wumman that's yer cousin, and that ye never saw or heard of before."

"I am a fiction-writer," Prime admitted, not without some little anxiety as to the effect the statement might have upon the hard-headed under-sheriff.

"Ou, ay! That's it, is it? A story-writer? And, besides that, ye're the biggest ful leevin' to tell it to me. Ye'll no be expectin' me to believe anything ye're sayin', after that! A novel-writer—losh!"

"One of the greatest Scotchmen the world ever saw was a novel-writer," Prime ventured to suggest.

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"And it's varra little to his credit, let me tell ye that, young man ! 'Tis mair becomin' to Sir Walter that he was sheriff depute o' Selkirkshire and clerk o' session for abune twenty-five year on end. That's a canty story for ye!"

Prime saw that he was making no headway with the Macdougal, and after the pipes were out he tried to compose himself to sleep. Some time later on, Macdougal changed places with one of the paddlers, and, seizing her opportunity, Lucetta crept back to take her place beside Prime. They talked in whispers for a while, each trying to cheer the other. The morning of new and more threatening involvements was only a short night distant, and in the light of the month of hardship and mystery they could only fear the worst and hope for the best.

"You must try to get what sleep you can," Prime urged at the last, arranging the nearest blanket-roll for her back-support. "We shall be up against it again in the morning, and we both ought to have clear heads and a good, cold nerve. Snuggle down and

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shut your eyes. I am going to do the same after I've smoked another pipe."

He kept his word, dropping off shortly after the big canoe had entered a long straight reach with twinkling lights on either shore to prove that the moving world was once more coming within shouting distance. How long he slept he did not know, but when he awoke the canoe was stopped in mid-stream, and was lying stem to stern beside a larger craft, in the hold of which throbbing machinery seemed to be running idle.

Vaguely he gathered the impression that the canoe had been held up by the motor-craft; then he realized that a fierce altercation was going on between a big man who was leaning over the side to grip the gunwale of the birch-bark and Under-sheriff Macdougal.

"I'll fight it out with you in any court you like, you stubborn blockhead!" Prime heard the big man bellow at Macdougal, and then the canoe was passed swiftly aft, somebody reached over the side and lifted him bodily into the cockpit of the motor-boat, and a moment later he found Lucetta

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beside him, staring wildly and clinging to him as if he were her only hope.

"Wha-what are they doing to us now?" she quavered, and as she spoke the grumbling machinery in the depths below roared a louder note, and the big motor-craft cut a careening half-circle in midstream, leaving the birch-bark to dance and wabble in the converging area of the furrowing bow wave. By this time Prime had shaken himself fully awake. The two deck-hands who had pulled him and Lucetta aboard had disappeared, and the big man who had been bullying Macdougal was at the wheel. There was a single electric bulb in the centre of the cockpit awning, and by its light Prime had his first good look at the big steersman.

"*Grider!*!" he exploded, taking a step toward the man at the wheel; and at that Miss Lucetta Millington drew herself up icily and turned her back.

XX

WATSON GRIDER

PRIME had often made his fictional heroes "see red" in exceptionally vigorous crises, and he was now able to verify the colorful figure of speech in his own proper person. Like a submerging wave the recollection of all that the heartless joke might have meant to a pair of helpless victims—of all that it had actually entailed in hardships and peril and sickness—rushed over him as he faced the handsome young giant at the wheel of the motor-cruiser.

"So it *was* you, after all!" he gritted. Then: "There are some few things that won't keep, Grider. Put this boat ashore where we can have a little more room. The account between us is too long to wait for daylight!"

The barbarian's answer to this was a shout of derisive laughter, and he made a show of putting the small steering-wheel between himself and his belligerent passenger.

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"Give me time, Don—just a little time to take it all in!" he gurgled. "Oh, my sainted grandmother! what a perfectly ripping fling you must have had, to make you turn loose all holds like this! And the lady—won't you—won't you introduce me?"

Lucetta faced about, and, if a look could have crippled, the motor-cruiser would have lost its steersman.

"Cousin Donald has tried to tell me about you, but the reality is worse than he or anybody could put into words!" she broke out in indignant scorn. "Of all the inhuman, dastardly things that have ever been done in the name of a practical joke, yours is certainly the climax, Mr. Grider!"

The young man at the wheel pursed his lips as if he were going to whistle; then he appeared to comprehend suddenly and went off in another gust of Hudibrastic mirth.

"I've been figuring it all out as I came along up river," he choked; "how you had tried to account for yourselves to each other —how you had been wrestling with the lack of all the little civilized knickknacks and notions—how you'd look when you came

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out. Excuse me, but your—your clothes, you know; you're a pair to make a wooden idol hold his sides and chortle himself to death!"

This seemed to be adding insult to injury, and by this time Prime was speechless, Berserk-mad, as he himself would have written it. Nothing but Lucetta's restraining hand upon his arm kept him from hurling himself, reckless of consequences, upon the heartless jester. When he could control his symptoms sufficiently to find a few coherent words, he contrived to ease the soul-nausea—in some small measure.

"There is another day coming, Grider; don't you lose sight of that for a single minute!" he raged. "I'm not saying anything about myself; perhaps I have given you cause to assume that you can pull off your brutal initiation stunts on me whenever you feel like it. That's all right, but you've overdone the thing this time. Miss Millington's quarrel is my quarrel. If I can't get you in any other way, I'll post you in every club you belong to as the man who plays horse-laugh jokes on women!"



"The account between us is too long to wait for daylight!"

Watson Grider

At this outburst Grider only laughed again, appearing to be entirely and quite joyously impervious to either scorn or red rage.

"Perhaps I do owe you both an apology—not for the joke—that is too ripping good to be spoiled—but for breaking your night's rest in that peppery Scotchman's birch-bark," he offered. "If you'll duck under the raised deck, you'll find two dog-kennel staterooms. The port-side kennel is yours, Don, and the other is Miss Millington's. Suppose you turn in and get your nap out. To-morrow morning, if you still feel in the humor for it, you can get together and give me what you seem to think is coming to me. *Shoo!* I can't steer this boat and play skittles with you at the same time. Run along to bed—both of you!"

With such a case-hardened barbarian for a host, there seemed to be nothing else to be done, and Prime took Lucetta's arm and helped her down into the tiny cabin. It was lighted, and the doors of the two box-like staterooms were open. Prime felt for the button on the jamb of the right-hand door

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and Lucetta's sleeping-niche sprang alight. She looked in and gave a little cry of astonishment.

"My suitcases!" she exclaimed; "the ones I left in the Quebec hotel!"

Prime snapped the opposite switch and looked on his own side. "My auto trunk, too," he conceded sourly. "We didn't need any more evidence, but this is conclusive. Grider has had his horse-laugh, and the least he could do in the wind-up was to bring us our belongings. I suppose we are compelled to be indebted to him for getting us out of the scrape with Macdougal, much as it goes against the grain; but to-morrow we'll settle with him."

Lucetta braced herself in her doorway against the surge and swing of the racing cruiser.

"He doesn't look like a man who could be so wholly lost to all sense of—of the fitness of things, Donald," she ventured, as one who would not be immitigably vindictive.

"He looks, and acts, like a wild ass of the desert!" Prime stormed, in a fresh access of

Watson Grider

resentment. And then: "You'd best go to bed and get what sleep you can. Heaven only knows what new piece of buffoonery will be sprung upon us to-morrow morning."

She looked up with the adorable little grimace, a copy of which he had long since resolved to wish upon his next and most bewitching heroine.

"I believe you are angry yet," she chided, half in mockery. "I like you best when you don't scowl so ferociously, Cousin Donald. You forget that we have agreed that it wasn't all bad. Good night." And she closed her door.

Turning out of his box-berth the next morning, Prime found the sun shining broadly in at the stateroom port-light. The motor-boat was at rest and the machinery was stopped. A bath, a shave, and a complete change to fresh haberdashery made him feel somewhat less pugnacious, and stumbling up the companion to the cockpit he saw that the cruiser was tied up at a wharf on the river fringe of a considerable city; saw, also, that Lucetta, likewise renewed as to her outward appearance, was awaiting him.

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"Where is Grider?" he demanded shortly.

"He has gone somewhere to get an auto to take us to a hotel."

"What city is this?"

"It is Ottawa. Don't you see the government buildings up there on the hill?"

Prime was silent for a moment. Then he said: "He needn't think he is going to smooth it all over by showing us a few little neighborly attentions. We are back in the good old civilized world once more, and we are not asking any favors of Watson Grider."

"Oh, I shouldn't feel that way, if I were you," she qualified. "He seems very humble and penitent this morning, though he is still twinkly-eyed, and I couldn't make him talk much. He said we'd want to be having our breakfast, and——"

"We don't breakfast with him," was the crabbed rejoinder.

"Why, Donald!" she protested, in a laughing mockery of deprecatory concern: "I believe you are still angry. You really mustn't hold spite, that way. It isn't nice—or Bankhead-y."

He looked her fairly in the eyes. "Don't

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begin by throwing the old minister ancestor up at me, Lucetta. I can't help the grouch, and I don't know as I want to help it. Every time I think of you lying there under the big spruces, sick and discouraged, suffering for the commonest necessities and with no possible chance of getting them, I want to go out and swear like a pirate and murder somebody. Why doesn't he bring that auto, if he is going to?"

As if the impatient demand had evoked him, Grider appeared on the wharf and beckoned to them. Prime helped his companion up to the string-piece, and had only a scowl for their late host as Grider led the way to the street and a waiting auto. The barbarian stood aside while Prime was putting Lucetta into the car and clambering in after her. Then he took the seat beside the driver, and no word was said until the car was stopped before the entrance of an up-town hotel, where Grider got down to open the tonneau door for the pair on the rear seat.

"You'll want to have your first civilized breakfast by yourselves and I shan't butt in," he offered good-naturedly. "Later on,

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say about ten o'clock, I'll be glad to see you both in the ladies' parlor—if you can forgive me that far."

Prime made no reply, but after they were seated in the comfortable breakfast-room and were revelling in their surroundings and in the efficient service he broke out again.

"Grider still has his brass-bound nerve with him; to ask us to meet him! I'd see him in kingdom come first, if I wasn't spoiling to tell him a few things."

"Perhaps he wishes to try to explain," came from the less vindictive side of the table-for-two. "Think a moment, Cousin Donald: you two have been friends and college chums, and—and Mr. Grider has been brotherly good to you in times past, hasn't he? And I don't want you to quarrel with him."

"Why don't you?"

"Because you have said enough to make me understand that you are doing it for my sake. That won't answer at all, you know."

"I don't see why it won't," Prime objected with sudden obtuseness.

"For the best possible reason; there is

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another woman to be considered. Sooner or later she will hear that you have broken with your best friend on account of a—a person she has never even heard of, and there will be consequences."

"Oh, if that is all"—and then he laughed. "You are either the most childlike bit of femininity the world has ever seen—or the most wilfully blind, Lucetta."

"‘Cousin Lucetta,’" she corrected. "We are back among the conventions, now."

He took the implied readjustment of their relations rather hard.

"That wasn't worthy of you," he protested warmly. "We have been too much to each other in the past month to go back of the returns in that way, don't you think?"

"I can tell better what I think after I have climbed down into my little groove in the girls' school," she returned half-absently, and beyond this the talk concerned itself with their plans for the immediate future, Prime still insisting that he meant to see his table companion safely home and setting the difficulties and objections aside as one who had a perfect right to do so.

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When the leisurely meal was finished Prime pushed his chair back and glanced at his watch.

"It is nearly ten o'clock," he announced. "Shall we go and meet Grider? Or shall we give him the cold shoulder he so richly deserves and go hunt up the railroad time-tables? It is for you to say."

She decided instantly.

"I think we ought to go and hear what Mr. Grider has to say for himself. We owe him that much for rescuing us from that terrible old Scotch under-sheriff."

And together they sought the hotel parlors.

XXI

THE FAIRY FORTUNE

MR. WATSON GRIDER was not alone when they found him. He was sharing a sofa in the public parlor with an elderly little gentleman whose winter-apple face was decorated with mutton-chop whiskers and wreathed in smiles—the smiles of a listener who has just heard a story worth retailing at the dinner-table.

The two stood up when Prime led his companion into the room, and Grider did the honors.

“Miss Millington, let me introduce Mr. Shellaby, an old friend of my father’s and the senior member of the firm of Shellaby, Grice, and Shellaby, solicitors. Mr. Shellaby—Miss Millington and Mr. Donald Prime.”

The little gentleman adjusted his eyeglasses and looked the pair over carefully. Then the twinkling smile hovered again at the corners of the near-sighted eyes.

“Are you—ah—are you aware of your

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relationship to this young lady, Mr. Prime?" he asked.

Prime made a sign of assent. "We figured it out one evening over our camp-fire. We are third cousins, I believe."

"Exactly," said Mr. Shellaby, matching his slender fingers and making a little bow. "Now another question, if you please: Mr. Grider tells me that you have just returned from a most singular and adventurous experience in the wilds of the northern woods. This experience, I understand, was entirely involuntary on your part. Have you—ah—formulated any theory to account for your—ah—abduction?"

Prime glanced at Grider and frowned.

"We know all we need to know about that part of it," he rejoined curtly. "Mr. Grider is probably still calling it a practical joke; but we call it an outrage."

The little man smiled again. "Exactly," he agreed; and then: "Do you happen to know what day of the month this is?"

Prime shook his head.

"We have lost count of the days. I kept a notched stick for a while, but I lost it along toward the last."

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Mr. Shellaby waved them to chairs, saying: "Be seated, if you please; we may as well be comfortable as we talk. This is the last day of July. Does that mean anything in particular to either of you?"

Lucetta gave a little cry of surprise.

"It does to me," she said quickly. "Did you—did you put an advertisement in a Cleveland newspaper addressed to me, Mr. Shellaby?"

"We did; and we also advertised for the heirs of Roger Prime, of Batavia, New York. We believed at the time that it was a mere matter of form; in fact, when we drew his will our client informed us that there would most probably be no results. He was of the opinion that neither Roger Prime nor Clarissa Millington had left any living children."

"Your client?" Prime interrupted. "May we ask who he is?"

"*Was*," corrected the small man gravely. "Mr. Jasper Bankhead died last January. You didn't know him, I'm sure; quite possibly you have never heard of him until this moment."

"We both know of him," Prime amended. "He was my great-uncle, and a cousin of

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Miss Millington's grandmother. He was scarcely more than a family tradition to either of us, however. We had both been told that he went west as a young man and was never heard of afterward."

Mr. Shellaby nodded soberly.

"Mr. Bankhead was a rather peculiar character in some respects; quite eccentric, in fact. He accumulated a great deal of property in British Columbia—in mining enterprises—and it was only in his latter years that he came here to live. We drew his will, as I have said. He was without family, and he left the bulk of his estate—something over two millions—to various charities and hospitals. There were other legacies, to be sure, and among them one which was to be divided equally between, or among, the direct heirs, if any could be discovered, of Clarissa Millington and Roger Prime."

"And if no such heirs could be found?" Prime inquired.

"Our client was quite sure that they wouldn't be found. It seems that he had previously had some inquiries made on his

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own account. For that reason he placed a comparatively short time limit upon our efforts and prescribed their form. We were to advertise in certain newspapers, and if there should be no answer within six months of the date of his death the legacy in question was to revert to his private secretary, a young man who had served him in many capacities, and who was, by the by, already generously provided for in a separate bequest."

Lucetta's gray eyes lighted suddenly and she spoke with a little catching of her breath.

"The name of that young man, Mr. Shellaby, is Horace Bandish, isn't it?" she suggested.

"Quite so," nodded the little man; and then, with the amused twinkle returning to point the bit of dry humor: "I am sorry to have to spoil your estimate of Mr. Grider's capabilities as a practical joker; yes, very sorry, indeed; but I'm afraid I must. Bandish was your kidnapper, you know, and it is owing entirely to Mr. Grider's energetic efforts that the fellow is at present safely lodged in the Ottawa jail awaiting indict-

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ment and trial. In order that he might be certain of adding your legacy to his own, he meant to deprive you both of any possible opportunity of communicating with us before July thirty-first. The young woman who calls herself his wife was his accomplice, but she has disappeared. Mr. Grider can give you the details of the plot better than I can."

"Then Grider didn't—then the legacy is ours?" Prime stammered, clutching manfully for handholds in the grapple with this entirely new array of things incredible.

"Precisely, Mr. Prime; yours and Miss Millington's. There will be some legal formalities, to be sure, but Mr. Grider assures us that you can comply with them. Compared with Mr. Bankhead's undivided total, the amount of the legacy is not great; some two hundred thousand dollars, less the costs of administration, to be divided equally between you if you prove to be the only surviving heirs direct of the two persons named in the will."

Prime turned slowly upon his companion castaway.

"You said you wanted enough, but not

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too much," he reminded her solemnly. "I hope you're not disappointed, either way. At all events, you'll never have to cook for a man again unless you really wish to, and you can have your wish about the world travel, too."

"And you can have yours about the writing of the leisurely book," she flashed back; "about that, and—and—"

Prime's laugh ignored the presence of Grider and the lawyer.

"And the imaginary girl, you were going to say? Yes; I shall certainly marry her, if she'll have me."

Mr. Shellaby was on his feet and bowing again.

"I think I have said all that needs to be said here and now," he concluded mildly. "If you will excuse me, I'll go. We are a rather busy office. Later, Mr. Grider may bring you to us and we can set the legal machinery in motion. I congratulate you both very heartily, I'm sure," and he shook hands all around and backed away.

When they were left alone with the barbarian, Prime wheeled short upon him.

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"Watson, will you raise your right hand and swear that this isn't another twist in your infernal joke?" he demanded. "Because, if it is——"

Grider fell back into the nearest chair and chuckled like a fat boy at a play.

"If it only were!" he gloated. "Wouldn't it be rich? Oh, Great Peter! why didn't I think of it in time and run a sham lawyer in on you? It would have been as easy as rolling off a log. Unhappily, Don, it's all too true. I didn't invent it—more's the pity!"

Prime stood over the joker, menacing him with a clenched fist. "If you want to go on living and spending your swollen fortune, you'll tell us all the ins and outs of it," he rasped, in well-assumed ferocity.

"I was only waiting for an invitation," was the laughing rejoinder. "When you didn't turn up in Boston to go motoring with me I ran over to New York and broke into your rooms. On your desk I found a telegram purporting to have come from me at Quebec. Since I hadn't wired you from Quebec, or anywhere else, I began to ask

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questions. Your janitor answered the first one: you had already gone to Canada. I couldn't imagine what was going on, but it seemed to be worth following up, so I took the next train for Quebec."

"And you didn't wire ahead?" said Prime.

"No; it didn't occur to me, but it wouldn't have done any good. Your disappearance was two days old when I reached Quebec. You weren't missed much, but Miss Millington was; the school-teachers were milling around and raising all sorts of a row. But in another day it quieted down flat. Somebody started the story that you two had run off together to get married; that it had been all cut and dried between you beforehand."

"That was probably a part of the plot—to account for us in that way," Lucetta put in.

"No doubt it was," Grider went on. "But the elopement story didn't satisfy me. I knew there wasn't any reason in the wide world why Don shouldn't get married openly, if he could find any girl foolish enough to say 'yes,' so I simply discounted the gossip and wired for detectives. A very little sleuth

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work developed the fact that each of you had been seen last in company with one of the Bandishes. That gave us a sort of a clew, and we began to trail Mr. Horace Bandish and dig up his record."

"And while you were doing all this for us, we . . . honestly, Mr. Grider, I am ashamed to tell you what we were saying of you," said the young woman in penitent self-abasement.

"Oh, that was all right. In times past I had given Don plenty of material of that sort to work on; only I wish I had known how you were looking at it—that you were charging it all up to me. It would have lightened the gloom immensely. But to get on: we trailed Bandish, as I say, and found that he had had an aeroplane shipped to him at Quebec a few days before your arrival there. That looked a bit suspicious, and a little more digging made it look more so. The 'plane had been unloaded and carted away, and a few days later had been brought back and shipped to Ottawa. That left a pretty plain trail, but still there was no evidence of criminality."

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"Of course, you didn't know anything about the legacy, at that stage of it?" Prime threw in.

"Not a thing in the world. More than that, Bandish's record was decently good. We found that he had been a sort of general factotum for a rich old man, and had been left comfortably well off when his employer died. There was absolutely no motive in sight; no reason on earth why he should drug a couple of total strangers and blot them out. Just the same, I was confident that he had done it, and that I should eventually find you by keeping cases on him. So I dropped the detectives, who were beginning to give me the laugh for being so pig-headed about an ordinary elopement, gathered up your belongings on the chance that you'd need 'em if I should make good in the search for you, and came here to Ottawa to keep in touch with Bandish."

Prime's smile was grim. "You were taking a lot of trouble for two people who were just about that time calling you all the hard names in the category," he interposed.

"Wasn't I?" said the barbarian with a

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grin. "But never mind about that. I came here, as I said, and settled down to keep an eye on Horace. For quite some time I didn't learn anything new. I found that Bandish was a club man, well known and rather popular; also that he was an amateur aviator and had made a number of exhibition flights. Everybody knew him and everybody seemed to like him. In the course of time we met at one of the clubs, and I watched him carefully when we were introduced. If he had sent the forged telegram it was proof that he knew me by name, at least. But he never made a sign.

"It was about a week later than this when I stumbled upon Mr. Shellaby and got my first real clew in the story of the legacy muddle. Of course, that opened all the doors, and after that I laid for Horace like a cat watching a mouse. Before long I could see that he was growing mighty nervous about something, and the next thing I knew he turned up missing. Right there I lost my head and wasted two whole days trying to find out which railroad he had taken out of town. Late in the evening of the second day

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I learned, by the merest bit of bull-headed luck, that he had gone up the Rivière du Lièvres in a motor-launch. I had a quick hunch that that motor-launch was pointing in your direction and that it was up to me to chase him and find you and get you back here before the thirty-first. Three hours later I had borrowed the *Sprite* and was after him."

"He found us," said Prime, rather grittingly. "We had stopped to patch our canoe, and he came up in the night and cut another hole in it. I mistook him for you—which was the chief reason why I didn't take a pot-shot at him as he was running away."

"I knew I had no chance to overtake him," Grider went on, "but it seemed a safe bet that I'd get him coming out. I did; captured him, took him ashore, built a fire, and told him I was going to roast him alive if he didn't come across with the facts. He held out for a while, but finally told me the whole of it: how he had figured to get you two together in Quebec after he had learned that you, Miss Millington, were due to be there with the teachers. You see, he knew all

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about you—both of you. As Mr. Bankhead's secretary he had made, at Mr. Bankhead's dictation, all the former inquiries, and, of course, had carefully kept the answers from reaching the old gentleman. With a little more cooking he told me how he and the woman had drugged you both, after which he had carried you in the 'plane to the shore of some unpronounceable lake in the north woods."

"What did he mean to do?—let us starve to death?" Prime asked.

"Oh, no; nothing so murderous as that! He had it all doped out beforehand. There is a Hudson Bay post on one of the streams flowing into the lake, and he had arranged with a couple of half-breed canoe-men to happen along and pick you up and bring you back, stipulating only that they should kill time enough to make the return trip use up the entire month of July. As the fatal date drew near, he grew uneasy and made the launch trip to see to it personally that you were not getting along too fast. He found your camp and cut your canoe merely to add a little more delay for good measure.

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He couldn't tell me what had become of his half-breeds."

Prime laughed. "I suppose the old Scotch under-sheriff told you, didn't he?"

"He tried to tell me that you and Miss Millington had assassinated the two men and stolen their canoe and outfit. You didn't do that?—or did you?"

"Hardly," Prime denied. Then he told the story of the finding of the dead men, capping it with an account of the chance visit of Jean Ba'tiste.

Grider left his chair and took a turn up and down the room.

"It was a great adventure," he declared, coming back to them. "Some day you are going to tell me all about it, and the kind of a time you had. I'll bet it was fierce—some parts of it, anyway. I can't answer for you, Miss Millington; but what Don doesn't know about roughing it is—or used to be—good and plenty."

"You sent Bandish back to town after you were through with him?" Prime inquired.

"Yes. I had taken a pair of handcuffs

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along, just on general principles, and I lent him my engineer to run the launch. Afterward, I kept on up-stream in the *Sprite*, hoping to meet you coming down; and hoping against hope that we would be able to beat the calendar back to Ottawa."

"We never should have beaten it if the old Scotchman hadn't taken a hand," was Prime's comment. "He saved us at least a full day."

Grider was edging toward the door. "I guess you don't need me any more just now," he offered. "I'm due to go and thank the good-natured lumber king who lent me the *Sprite*. By and by, after the dust has settled a bit, I'll come around and show you where Mr. Shellaby holds forth."

"One minute, Mr. Grider," Lucetta interposed hastily. "We can't let you go without asking your forgiveness for the way in which we have been vilifying you for a whole month, and for what we both said to you last night. I must speak for myself, at least, and——"

"Don't," said Grider, laughing again. "It's all in the day's work. As it happened,

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I wasn't the goat this time, but that isn't saying that I mightn't have done something quite as uncivilized if you had given me a chance. You two gave me one of the few perfect moments of a rather uneventful life last night when you made me understand that you were giving me credit for the whole thing—as a joke! I only wish I could invent one half as good. And that reminds me, Don; can you—er—do you think you'll be able to put a real woman into the next story?"

For some few minutes after the barbarian had ducked and disappeared a stiff little silence fell upon the two he had left behind. In writing about it Prime would have called it an interregnum of readjustment. He had gone to a window to stare aimlessly down into the busy street, and Lucetta was sitting with her chin in her cupped palms and her eyes fixed upon the rather garish pattern of the paper on the opposite wall. After a time Prime pulled himself together and went back to her.

"It is all changed, isn't it?" he said, in a rather flat voice. "Everything is changed.

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You are no longer a teacher, working for your living. You are an heiress, with a snug little fortune in your own right."

She looked up at him with the bright little smile which had been brought over intact from the days of the banished conventions.

"Whatever you say I am, you are," she retorted cheerfully. "Only I can't quite believe it yet—about the money, you know."

"You'd better," he returned gloomily. "Besides, it is just what you said you wanted—neither too little nor too much: one hundred thousand at a good, safe six per cent will give you an income of six thousand a year. You can travel on that for the remainder of your natural life."

"Easily," she rejoined. "And you can write the leisurely book and marry the girl. Perhaps you will be doing both while I am getting ready to go on my travels. You won't insist upon going back to Ohio with me now, will you? You—you ought to go straight to the girl, don't you think?"

"You are forgetting that I said she was an imaginary girl," he parried.

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"You said so at first; but afterward you admitted that she wasn't. Also, you promised me you would show me her picture after we should get out of the woods."

"I have never had her picture," he denied. "I said I would show you what she looks like. Come to the window where the light is better."

She went with him half-mechanically. Between the two windows there was an old-fashioned pier-glass set in the wall. Before she realized what he was doing he had led her before the mirror.

"There she is, Lucetta," he said softly; "the only girl there is—or ever will be."

She started back with a little cry, putting out her hands as if to push him away.

"No, Donald—a thousand times no!" she flashed out. "Do you think I don't know that this is only another way of telling me how sorry you are for me? You know well enough what people will say when they hear how we have been together for a whole month, alone; and in your splendid chivalry you would——"

He did not let her finish. The hotel parlor

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was supposed to be a public room, but he ignored that and took her in his arms.

"From the first day, Lucetta, dear—from the very first day!" he argued passionately. "And it grew and grew with your absolute, your simply angelic trust in me until I was half-mad with the desire to tell you. But I couldn't tell you then; I couldn't even let you suspect and still be what you were believing me to be. Don't you think you could learn, in time, you know, to—to—"

Her face was hidden, but she made her refusal quite positive.

"No, Donald, I can never learn it—again. Because, you see, in spite of the other girl I was believing in—that you made me believe in—I— Oh, it was wicked, *wicked!*—but I couldn't help it! And all the time I was sc-scared perfectly frantic for fear you would find it out!"

"You were, were you?" he laughed happily. "Perhaps I did find it out—just a little. . . ."

It was something like an hour later, and an overruling Providence had graciously pre-

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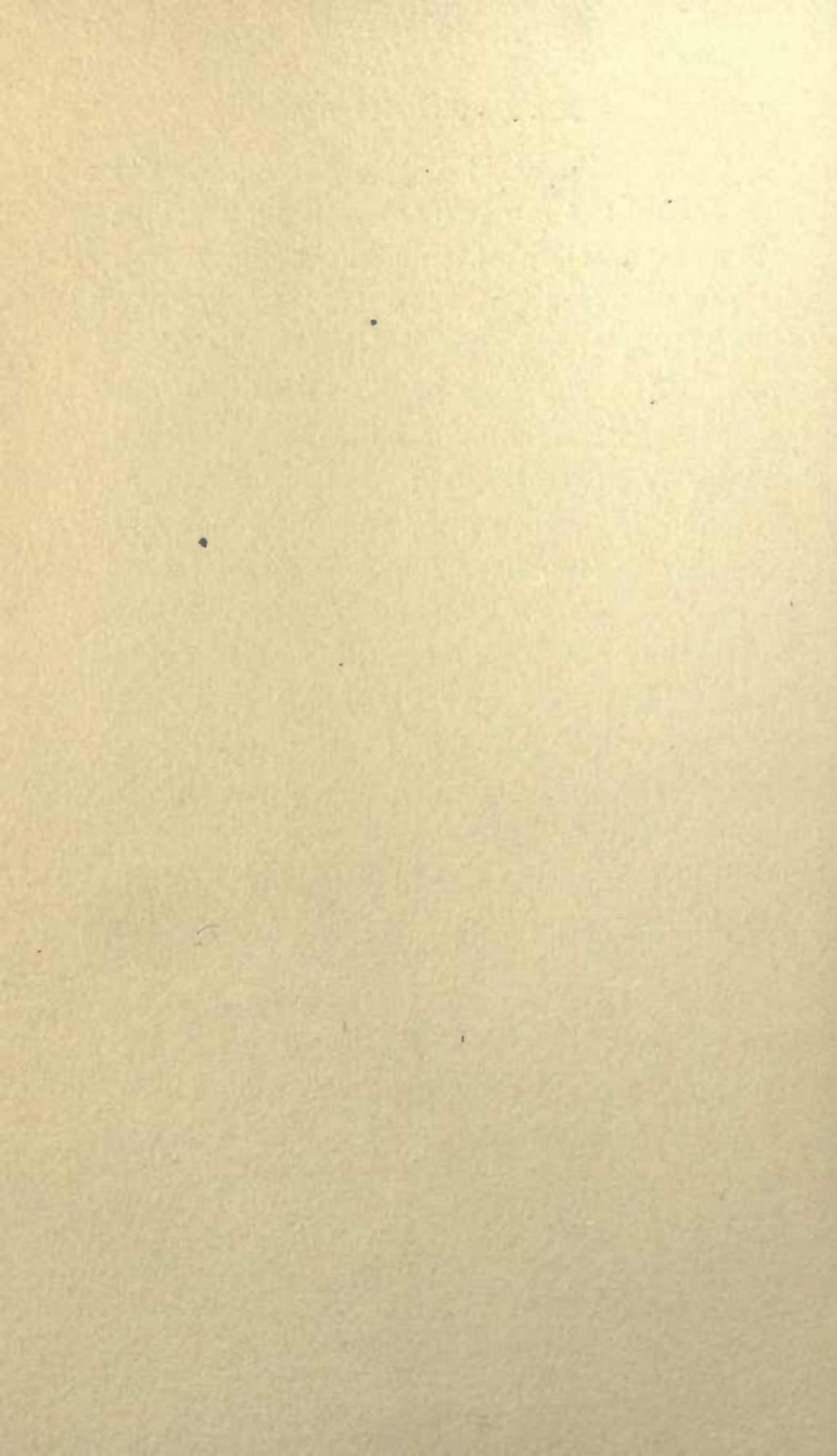
served the privacy of the public parlor for them during the entire length of the precious interval, when Prime looked at his watch and said: "Heavens, Lucetta! it's nearly noon! Let's go quickly and beard the Shelloby in his den before he goes to luncheon. The fairy fortune may escape us yet if we don't hurry up and nab it."

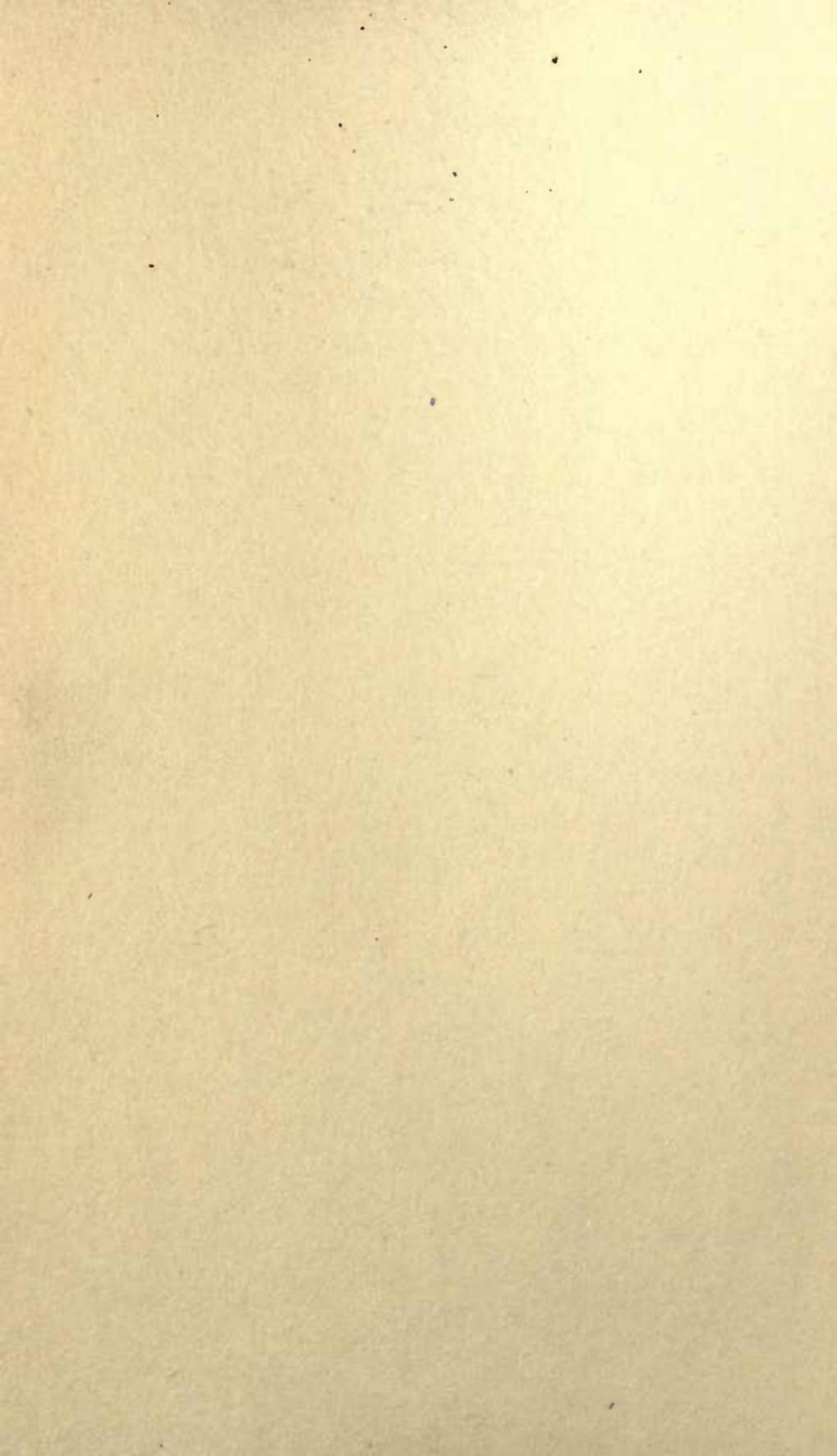
She had risen with him, and her eyes were shining when she lifted her face and let him see them.

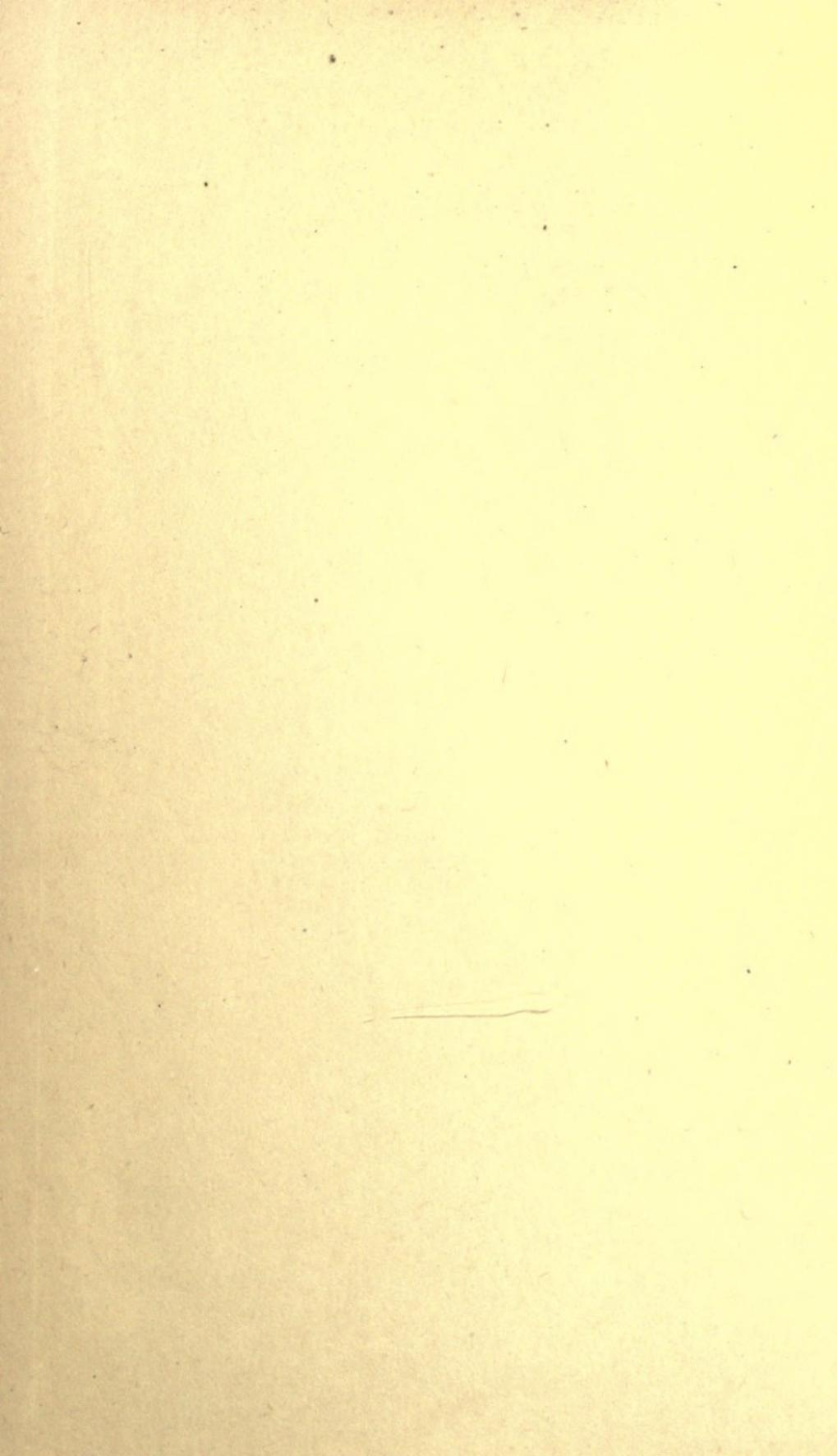
"As if the money, or anything else in this world, could make any difference to either of us now, Donald, dear!" she protested, with a fine scorn of such inconsequential things as fairy fortunes.

And Prime, seeing the unashamed love in the shining eyes, joyously agreed with her.

THE END







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